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Alfredo M. Bonanno
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The Anarchist Tension

Alfredo M. Bonanno

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I am always somewhat embarrassed when I begin a talk, at least to start with. And this embarrassment increases in the case of what we mistakenly call conferences, or as one more modestly tries to camouflage them, conference-debates. After all, it is a question of someone turning up from elsewhere, perhaps from another generation, as though they have rained in from the past. Someone who stands in this classroom to give a talk and strangely, even dangerously, resembles those who hammer your brains with quite different intentions. If you listen carefully however you will find that, beyond appearances, there is a considerable difference in the concepts I am about to outline.

The first of these concepts takes the form of a question: What is anarchism? It might seem strange that I should take up such a problem in this situation as I know for certain that there are many anarchists here, because I know them personally. And if nothing else, anarchists should at least know what anarchism is. Yet it is necessary to take up the question 'What is anarchism?' time and time again. Even in a few words. Why is that? This does not normally happen in other expressions of life, in other activities or ideas that define themselves with some foundation to be something or other.

So anarchists keep asking themselves the same question: What is anarchism? What does it mean to be an anarchist? Why? Because it is not a definition that can be made once and for all, put in a safe and considered a heritage to be tapped little by little. Being an anarchist does not mean one has reached a certainty or said once and for all, 'There, from now on I hold the truth and as such, at least from the point of view of the idea, I am a privileged person'. Anyone who thinks like this is an anarchist in word alone. Instead the anarchist is someone who really puts themselves in doubt as such, as a person, and asks themselves: What is my life according to what I do and in relation to what I think? What connection do I manage to make each day in everything I do, a way of being an anarchist continually and not come to agreements,

make little daily compromises, etc? Anarchism is not a concept that can be locked up in a word like a gravestone. It is not a political theory. It is a way of conceiving life, and life, young or old as we may be, whether we are old people or children, is not something final: it is a stake we must play day after day. When we wake up in the morning and put our feet on the ground we must have a good reason for getting up, if we don't it makes no difference whether we are anarchists or not. We might as well stay in bed and sleep. And to have a good reason we must know what we want to do because for anarchism, for the anarchist, there is no difference between what we do and what we think, but there is a continual reversal of theory into action and action into theory. That is what makes the anarchist unlike someone who has another concept of life and crystallises this concept in a political practice, in political theory.

This is what is not normally said to you, this is what you never read in the newspapers, this is what is not written in books, this is what school jealously keeps quiet about, because this is the secret of life: never ever separate thought from action, the things we know, the things we understand, from the things we do, the things with which we carry out our actions.

Here is what distinguishes a politician from an anarchist revolutionary. Not the words, not the concepts and, allow me, in certain aspects not even the actions because it is not their extreme — let us say radical — conclusion in attack that differentiates and characterises actions. It is not even accuracy in the choice of objective that qualifies them but it is the way in which the person, the comrade who carries out these actions, succeeds in making them become an expressive moment of their lives, a specific characterisation, meaning, quality of life, joy, desire, beauty, not the practical realisation, not the sullen realisation of a deed that is mortally an end in itself and enables one to say; 'I have done something today' far from myself, at the periphery of my existence.

There, that is one difference. And from this difference another emerges, a considerable one in my opinion. Anyone who thinks that things to be done are outside ourselves and are realised as a number of successes and failures — life is a staircase, at times you go up, at times you go down. There are times when things go well, and times when they go badly. There, whoever thinks life is made up of such things: for example, the classic figure of the democratic politician (for goodness' sake, someone you can talk to, a friendly guy, tolerant who has a permissive side to him, believes in progress, in the future, in a better society, in freedom) well, a person like this, probably not wearing a double-breasted jacket, no tie, so casual, a person who close up looks like a comrade and who himself declares he is a comrade, this person could very well be a cop, it makes no difference. Why not? There are democratic policemen, the era of uniform repression is over, repression has friendly aspects today, they repress us with lots of brilliant ideas. How can we identify this person then, this democrat, how can we recognise him? And if he pulls the wool over our eyes to prevent us from seeing him, how can we defend ourselves from him? We can identify him through this fact: that for him life is realisation, his life is made up of doing things, a quantitative doing that unfolds before his eyes, and nothing else.

When we talk to someone we cannot ask to see their membership card. Their ideas often make us end up totally confused and unable to understand anything because we are all nice, progressive chatterboxes and all praise the beauty of tolerance and such like. How can we see that we have an enemy before us, the worst of our enemies? Because at least we could defend ourselves from the old fascist. He hit out, and if we were capable of it we hit him back, harder. Now things have changed, the situation has changed. It can even be difficult to fish out a fascist thug today. But the individual we are trying to describe, this democrat that we find all over the place, in school, Parliament, in the streets or in the policeman's uniform, a judge or a doctor, this fellow here is our enemy because

call modern capitalism, post industrial capitalism, are being transformed; of some anarchist structures of struggle that are no longer acceptable today and the way one can oppose oneself to the reality of power and, finally, I mentioned the difference between traditional anarchism and the insurrectional anarchism of the present day.

Thank you.

happens that someone says to me; 'But what results have we obtained?' When something is done, people don't even remember the anarchists afterwards. 'Anarchists? Who are these anarchists? Monarchists? Are they these people who support the king?' People don't remember very well. But what does it matter? It is not us that they must remember, but their struggle, because the struggle is theirs, we are simply an opportunity in that struggle. We are something extra.

In the freed society where anarchy has been reached in a quite ideal dimension, anarchists, who are indispensable in the social struggle at all levels, would simply have the role of pushing struggles further and further, eliminating even the smallest traces of power and always perfecting the tension towards anarchy. Anarchists inhabit an uncomfortable planet in any case because when the struggle is going well they are forgotten about and when the struggle goes badly they are accused of being responsible, of having approached it the wrong way, of having taken it to the wrong conclusions. No illusion then concerning any quantitative results: if the struggle realised from an insurrectional point of view is correct, has gone well, the results if any might be useful to the people who brought it about, certainly not to the anarchists. It is important not to fall prey to the illusion that many anarchists unfortunately do, of believing that the positive outcome of a struggle can result in a growth in our groups, because that is not so and this systematically leads to disillusion. The growth of our groups and an increase in the number of comrades is important but that does not come about from the results obtained so much as through the building, the formation, of these idea-force, the clarification we talked about earlier. The positive results of struggles and the numerical growth in anarchist groups are two things that cannot be seen as a process of cause and effect. They might be connected, they might not.

Just a couple of words to wind up I have talked about what anarchism is, what democracy is and the incomprehension we are constantly being faced with; of the ways the structures of power we

he considers life in a different way to the way we consider it, because for him life is another kind of life, is not our life, because for him we are extraterrestrials and I don't see why we should consider him to be an inhabitant of our planet either. This is the dividing line between us. Because his concept of life is of a quantitative nature, because he measures things like success or, if you like, failure, but always from the quantitative point of view and we measure them differently and that is what we should be thinking about: in what way does life have a different meaning for us, a meaning that is qualitatively different?

So, this amiable gentleman wreaks criticism upon us and says, 'Yes, anarchists are good people but they are ineffectual. What have they ever done in history? What State has ever been anarchist? Have they ever realised government without a government? Isn't a free society, an anarchist society, a society without power, a contradiction?' And this critical rock that crashes down on us is certainly consistent, because in fact if you look closely at anywhere that anarchists got near to realising their utopia of a free society such as in Spain or Russia, if you look at them closely, you find these constructions are somewhat open to criticism. They are certainly revolutions, but they are not libertarian revolutions, they are not anarchy.

So, when these gentlemen say, 'You are utopians, you anarchists are dreamers, your utopia would never work', we must reply, 'Yes, it's true, anarchism is a tension, not a realisation, not a concrete attempt to bring about anarchy tomorrow morning'. But we must also be able to say but you, distinguished democratic gentlemen in government that regulate our lives, that think you can get into our heads, our brains, that govern us through the opinions that you form daily in your newspapers, in the universities, schools, etc., what have you gentlemen accomplished? A world worth living in? Or a world of death, a world in which life is a flat affair, devoid of any quality, without any meaning to it? A world where one reaches a certain age, is about to get one's pension, and asks oneself, 'But

what have I done with my life? What has been the sense of living all these years?'

That's what you have accomplished, that is what your democracy is, your idea of the people. You are governing a people, but what does people mean? Who are the people? Are they perhaps that small, not even very significant, part who vote, go to the elections, vote for you, nominate a minority which in turn nominates another minority even smaller than the first that governs us in the name of the law? But what are these laws if not the expression of the interests of a small minority specifically aimed in the first place at benefiting their own perspectives of enrichment, the re-enforcing of their power and so on?

You govern in the name of a power, a force that comes from what? From an abstract concept, you have realised a structure you think can be improved upon… But how, in what way has it ever been improved in history? What condition are we are living in today if not a condition of death, of a flattening of quality? This is the critique we need to throw back at the supporters of democracy. If we anarchists are utopians, we are so as a tension towards quality; if democrats are utopians, they are so as a reduction towards quantity. And against reduction, against the atrophy lived in a dimension of the minimum possible damage for them and the maximum damage for the great number of people who are exploited, to this miserable reality we oppose our utopia which is at least a utopia of quality, a tension towards another future, one that will be radically different to what we are living now.

So all the remarks made by anyone who talks to you in the name of political realism, men of State, teachers (who are the servants of men of State), theorists, journalists, all the intellectuals who pass through classrooms like this and in their speechifying talk with the calm, tolerant words of the realist, state that in any case nothing else is possible, reality is what it is, it is necessary to make sacrifices; there, these people are swindling you. They are swindling you because you can do something else, because any

or if there were no little regional parliaments. The cultural power that oppresses us, that fabricates opinion, would not be possible if there were no schools and universities. Now, schools, universities, police stations, prisons, industries, factories, are all things that realise themselves in specific places, in circumscribed areas which we can only move around in if we accept given conditions and play the game. We are here at the moment because we agreed to play the game. We would not have been able to enter the building otherwise. This is interesting. We can use structures of this kind. But at the time of attack such places are forbidden to us. If we were to have come in here with the intent of attacking, the police would obviously have prevented us.

Now, because power realises itself in physical space, anarchists' relation to this is important. Of course insurrection is an individual fact and so in that place deep inside us, at night as we are about to go to sleep, we think '… well, in the last analysis things aren't too bad', one feels at peace with oneself and falls asleep. There, in that particular place inside us, that private space, we can move about as we please. But then we must transfer ourselves into the physical space of social reality. And physical space, when you think about it, is almost exclusively under the control of power. So, when we move about in this space we carry this value of insurrection with us, these revolutionary values, and measure them in a clash in which we are not the only ones present.

We must therefore individuate significant objectives and verify their existence — and as luck would have it these objectives exist perpetually, everywhere — ,contribute to creating the conditions so that people, the exploited on whose backs these objectives are realised, do something to destroy them.

I believe this revolutionary process is of an insurrectional nature. It does not have aims (and this is important) of a quantitative nature, because the destruction of an objective or the prevention of a project cannot be measured in quantitative terms. It sometimes

So insurrectionalist anarchism must overcome one essential problem. It must go beyond a certain limit otherwise it will remain no more than the idea of insurrectionalist anarchism That is the comrades who have lived that insurrection of a personal nature we mentioned earlier, that illumination which produces an idea-force inside us in opposition to the chatter of opinion, and form affinity groups, enter into relationships with comrades from other places through an informal kind of structure, only realise a part of the work. At a certain point they must decide, must go beyond the demarcation line, take a step that it is not easy to turn back from. They must enter into a relationship with people that are not anarchists concerning a problem that is intermediate, circumscribed (such as, for example the destruction of the base in Comiso). No matter how fantastic or interesting this idea might have been it certainly wasn't the realisation of anarchy. What would have happened if one had really managed to enter the base and destroy it? I don't know. Probably nothing, possibly everything. I don't know, no one can tell. But the beauty of realising the destructive event is not to be found in its possible consequences.

Anarchists guarantee none of the things they do. They point out the responsibility of persons and structures on the basis of the decision that they are determined to act, and from that moment on they feel sure of themselves because their idea of justice illuminates their action. It points at one person's responsibility, or that of more people, one structure or more structures, and the consequences that such responsibility leads to. It is here that we find anarchists' determination to act.

But once they act along with other people, they must also try to build organisms that are capable of holding together and creating consequences in the struggle against power. We must never forget this. And this is an important point to reflect upon: power realises itself in time and space, it is not something abstract. Control would not be possible if police stations did not exist, if prisons did not exist. Legislative power would not be possible if parliament did not exist,

one of us is capable of rising up in the name of our wounded dignity before such a swindle. Because any one of us can realise that we have been swindled, because we have finally realised what is being done to our detriment. And in rising up against it all we can change not only the reality of things within the limits that it is possible to know them, but also one's life, make it worthy of being lived. One can get up in the morning, put one's feet on the ground, look in the mirror and say to oneself, 'At last I have managed to change things, at least as far as I am concerned' and feel one is a person worthy of living his or her life, not a puppet in the hands of a puppeteer you can't even see well enough to spit in their face.

So that is why anarchists keep coming back to the question of what anarchism is. Because anarchism is not a political movement. Or rather it is, but only in a minor aspect. The fact that the anarchist movement presents itself historically as a political movement does not mean that this exhausts all the anarchist potential for life. Anarchism does not resolve itself in the Cuneo anarchist group, or groups in Turin, London or anywhere else. That is not anarchism. Of course there are anarchists there, or at least one should assume there are, the kind of comrades who have begun their own insurrection individually, have become aware of the context of obligation and coercion that they are forced to live in. But anarchism is not just that, it is also a tension, the quality of life, the strength we manage to draw out of ourselves, the capacity to change the reality of things. Anarchism is the whole of this project of transformation linked to what we realise in ourselves when we bring about our own personal transformation. So it is not a quantifiable fact that can be historicised. Nor is it an event that will simply occur in the course of time, appearing through particular theories, people, movements as well as, why not, precise revolutionary acts. There is always something more than the sum of these elements, and it is this something more that continues to make anarchism live on in other ways.

So we continually need to maintain a relationship between this tension towards something absolutely other, the unthinkable, the unsayable, a dimension we must realise without very well knowing how to, and the daily experience of the things we can and do, do. A precise relationship of change, of transformation.

The first example that comes to mind on this question is another contradictory element. Think of the concept behind the statement 'there are problems to be solved'. This is a classic phrase. We all have problems to solve. Life itself is a problem to be solved. Living is a problem, our social conditions, having to break through the circle that restricts us, right to simple everyday goings on. We consider all this to be a problem.

And herein lies the great misunderstanding. Why? The structures that oppress us (I think many of those present here are students) maintain that problems can be solved and that they can solve them for us. Moreover, they use the example of problems that are solved in geometry, mathematics, etc.. But this kind of problem, the problems of mathematics that are presented as resolvable are false problems, they are not really solved at all. The answers to them are simply a repetition of the same problem in another form, in technical terms, a tautology. One says one thing and answers by repeating the same thing another way. So, basically, the problem is not solved at all, it is merely repeated.

And when we talk of solving a problem that involves the lives of all of us, our daily existence, we are talking of questions of such complexity that they cannot be reduced to a simple restatement of the problem itself. Take, for example, 'the problem of the police'. The existence of the police constitutes a problem for many of us. There can be no doubt that the policeman is an instrument of repression used by the State to prevent us from doing certain things. How do you solve such a problem? Can the problem of the police be solved? The very question reveals itself to be absurd. There is no such thing as solving the problem of the police. Yet from a democratic point of view it would be possible to solve some as-

ing for orders from anywhere else. Then the characteristic of being 'autonomous', that is of not depending on or having any relations at all with political parties or trade union organisations. Finally, the characteristic of facing problems one by one and not proposing platforms of generic claims that would inevitably transform themselves into administration along the lines of a mini-party or a small alternative trades union. The summary of these ideas might seem rather abstract and that is why before ending I would like to give an example, because some of these things can be better understood in practice.

A theoretical model of this kind was used in an attempt to prevent the construction of the American missile base in Comiso in the early '80s. The anarchists who intervened for two years built 'self-managed leagues'. These self-managed leagues were precisely non-anarchist groups that operated in the area with the unique aim of preventing the construction of the base by destroying the project in the course of realisation.

The leagues were autonomous nuclei characterised by the fact that their only aim was to attack and destroy the base. They did not take on a whole series of problems, because if they had done they would have become groups of syndicalists with the aim of, let us say, defending jobs or finding work or resolving other immediate problems. Instead, their sole aim was to destroy the base. The second characteristic was permanent conflict, i.e., from the moment these groups were formed (they were not specifically anarchist groups, but there were people in them who were anarchists), they went into conflict with all the forces involved in building the base, without this conflict being determined or declared by any representative organism or by the anarchists who had promoted the initiative. The third characteristic was the complete autonomy of these groups, that is to say they did not have links with any parties or unions, etc. The struggle against the base is known in part, and in part not. And I don't know if it is the case to take up the story again here, I just wanted to mention it as an example.

about actions. So, there is a continual reciprocal process of going into ideas and realising actions.

A small group of comrades, a small group who simply meet in the evening to have a chat would not be an affinity group but a group of friends, pub-mates who meet in the evenings to talk about anything under the sun. On the contrary, a group that meets to discuss things and in discussing prepares itself for doing and through that doing contributes to developing discussion that transforms itself into discussion about things to be done, this is the mechanism of the affinity group. So how then can affinity groups enter into contact with others where the deepened knowledge that exists in the single group does not necessarily exist? This contact can be assured by informal organisation.

But what is an informal organisation? There could be relationships of an informal kind between the various affinity groups that enter into contact with each other in order to exchange ideas and do things together, and consequently the existence of an organisation, also very widespread throughout the country, comprised of even tens, or why not, hundreds of organisations, structures, groups of an informal character based on discussion, periodic analyses, things to be done together, etc. The organisational logic of insurrectional anarchism is different to the organisations we mentioned earlier concerning anarcho-syndicalism.The organisational forms referred to here in a few words merit going into, something I cannot do now in the dimension of a conference. But such a way of organising would, in my opinion, remain simply something within the anarchist movement were it not also to realise relations beyond it, that is through the construction of external groups, external nuclei, also with informal characteristics. These groups should not be composed of anarchists alone, anyone who intends to struggle to reach given objectives, even circumscribed ones, could participate so long as they take a number of essential conditions into account. First of all permanent conflict, that is groups with the characteristic of attacking the reality in which they find themselves without wait-

pects by democratising certain structures, changing policemen's attitudes and so on. Now, to think that this might be a solution to the problem of control and repression would be as stupid as it is illogical. In actual fact, it is nothing other than a way of regulating repression in keeping with the interests of power, of the State. If a democratic politic is effective today, a far less democratic structure of control and repression might be effective in the future just as it has been in the past and any rare, marginal minorities who thought otherwise on the subject would be expelled or eliminated from the ranks.

When I say police, I mean any repressive structure from military police to judiciary, all expressions of the State that serve to control and repress. So, as you can see, social problems cannot be solved. The swindle operated by democratic structures is precisely their claim to solve such problems. This swindle shows how democratic politics are not based on reality or even a minimum of concreteness. Everything is rigged up on the implication that things can be improved, can be resolved in time, can be set right. It is in this concept of setting things right that the strength of power lies, and it is on this improvement that power stands and continues in the medium and long term. Power relations change as we wait for what they promised to come about but it never does. Because these improvements never materialise. Because power changes and transforms itself throughout history, yet always remains the same. A handful of men, a minority of privileged people who hold the levers of power, look after their own interests and safeguard the conditions of supremacy of whoever happens to be in command.

Now, what instruments do we have to combat this state of affairs? They want to control us? So we refuse control. Of course we can do this. We undoubtedly do, trying to minimise the damage. But to refuse control in a social context is only valid up to a point. We can circumscribe certain aspects of it, yell when we are struck unfairly; but there are clearly certain areas of power where rules are called laws, signposts indicate enclosures and men call-

ing themselves policemen prevent us from entering. There is no doubt about it, try getting into Parliament and see what happens. I don't know. Certain levels cannot be gone beyond, certain controls are inevitable.

So what do we do to oppose this situation? Simply dream? Have an idea of freedom, which moreover must be carefully formulated, because we cannot say: 'the freedom anarchists want is simply a reduction in control'. In that case we would find ourselves faced with the problem: 'But where does this reduction in control end?' At a minimal level perhaps? For example, would the State become legitimate for anarchists if instead of being the oppressor State of today, it were to become, let us say, the ideal minimal State of the liberals? No, certainly not. So that is not the way to think. It is not a question of trying to limit control, but of abolishing control altogether. We are not for more freedom. More freedom is given to the slave when his chains are lengthened. We are for the abolition of the chain, so we are for freedom, not more freedom. Freedom means the absence of all chains, the absence of limits and all that ensues from such a statement.

Freedom is a difficult, unknown concept. It is a painful one, yet it is peddled as something beautiful, sweet, reposing. Like a dream so far off that it makes us feel good, like all the things that, being far off, constitute hope and faith, a belief. In other words, these intangibles which apparently solve today's problems do not in fact solve them but simply mist them over, change them around, preventing us from having a clear vision of all the woes of our times. All right, some day we will be free. OK, things are in a mess, but within this mess there is a subterranean strength, an involuntary order independent of ourselves that works in place of us, which will gradually change the conditions of suffering which we are living in and take us to a free dimension where we will all live happily ever after. No, that is not freedom, that is a swindle that tragically resembles the old idea of God that often helped us, and still helps many people today in their suffering, because they say to themselves, 'very well,

would there be in a syndicalist movement of a revolutionary nature? What sense would there be in an anarcho-syndicalist movement? None at all.

So the struggle must begin elsewhere, with other ideas and methods. That is why we have been developing a critique of syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism for about fifteen years. That is why we are, and define ourselves, insurrectionalist anarchists. Not because we think the solution is the barricades — the barricades could be a tragic consequence of choices that are not our own — but we are insurrectionalists because we think that anarchist action must necessarily face very serious problems. These problems are not desired by anarchism but are imposed by the reality that those in power have built, and we cannot obliterate them simply by wishing them away.

An anarchist organisation that projects itself into the future should therefore be agile. It cannot present itself with the cumbersome characteristics and quantitative heaviness of the structures of the past. It cannot present itself in a dimension of synthesis like organisations of the past where the anarchist structures claimed to sum up reality in 'commissions' that treated all the various problems, making decisions at periodical congresses on the basis of theses that even went back to the last century. All this has seen its day, not because a century has passed since it was thought out, but because reality has changed.

That is why we maintain there is a need for the formation of small groups based on the concept of affinity, even tiny groups made up of very few comrades who know each other and deepen this knowledge because there cannot be affinity if one does not have knowledge of the other. One can only recognise one's affinities by going into the elements that determine one's differences, by frequenting each other. This knowledge is a personal fact, but it is also a question of ideas, debate, discussions. But in relation to the first points we made this evening, if you remember, there can be no going into ideas if there is not also a practice of bringing

limited themselves to bringing about certain modifications in particular instruments, they have transformed all the other technologies as well. The factory, for instance, is not simply a structure of the past with the addition of computer technology but has become a computerised factory, which is quite different. Bearing this in mind we can only mention these concepts in a very general way because it would take time to go into them adequately. So we must recognise that it is not possible to use this patrimony. This passage runs parallel to the end of the myth of the centrality of the working class.

Now, in a situation where the working class has practically disintegrated, the possibility of an expropriation of the means of production no longer exists. So what is the conclusion? The only possible conclusion is that this set of instruments of production we have before us be destroyed. The only possible way is to pass through the dramatic reality of destruction. If the revolution we imagine and which moreover we cannot be certain will ever come about, it will not be the revolution of the past that saw itself as one single event that might even take place in a day or one fine evening but will be a long, tragic, bloody affair that could pass through inconceivably violent, inconceivably tragic processes.

All this is the kind of reality we are moving towards. Not because that is what we desire, not because we like violence, blood, destruction, civil war, death, rape, barbarity. It is not that, but because it is the only plausible road, the road that the transformation wanted by those ruling us and who are in command have made necessary. They have moved on to this road. We cannot change all that with a simple flight of fancy, a simple dream. In the past hypothesis where a strong working class existed, one could fool oneself about this passage and organise accordingly. For example, the organisational proposal of anarcho-syndicalism saw a strong syndicalist movement which, penetrating the working class and organising almost the whole of it, was to bring about this expropriation and passage. This collective subject, who was probably mythical from the start, no longer exists even in its mythical version so what sense

we are suffering today, but we'll be better off in the next world'. In fact, as the gospel says the last will be first, heartening the last of today because they see themselves as the first of tomorrow.

If we were to fob off such an idea of freedom as real we would be doing no more than cradling today's suffering by medicating social wounds in exactly the same way as the priest heals those of the poor who listen to his sermon, deceiving themselves that the kingdom of God will save them from their pain. Anarchists cannot think this way. Freedom is a destructive concept that involves the absolute elimination of all limits. Now freedom is an idea we must hold in our hearts, but at the same time we need to understand that if we desire it we must be ready to face all the risks that destruction involves, all the risks of destroying the constituted order we are living under. Freedom is not a concept to cradle ourselves in, in the hope that improvements will develop independently of our real capacity to intervene.

In order to understand such concepts, become aware of the risks one runs by wielding such dangerous concepts, we must be able to form the idea within us.

There is also considerable confusion on this point. It is customary to consider that anything that passes through our minds is an idea. One says 'I have an idea' then tries to understand what that means. That is the Cartesian concept of idea as opposed to the Platonic one which is an abstract far off point of reference. But that is not what we are referring to when we say idea. The idea is a point of reference, an element of strength that is capable of transforming life. It is a concept charged with value that becomes a concept of strength, something that can develop and make our relationship with others different. All that is an idea. But what is the source that the elements that make it possible to elaborate such ideas spring from? School, university, newspapers, books, teachers, technicians, television and so on? What reaches us from these instruments of information and cultural elaboration? A considerable accumulation of information cascades down on us, boils

inside us like a cauldron, making us produce opinions. We tend not to have ideas, but opinions.

That is the tragic conclusion. What is an opinion? It is a flattened idea, an idea that has been made uniform in order to make it acceptable to the largest number of people. Opinions are massified ideas. It is important for power that these opinions be maintained because it is through opinion, the control of opinion, that they obtain given results, not least the mechanisms of propaganda and electoral procedures through the use of the media. The formation of new power elite's comes not from ideas but from opinions.

What does opposing oneself to opinion-making mean then? Does it mean acquiring more information? That is, opposing counter-information to information? No, that is not possible because no matter how you look at it you cannot possibly oppose the vast amount of information we are bombarded with daily with counter-information capable of 'unmasking' through a process of investigating hidden causes, the reality that has been covered up by all that informative chatter. No, we cannot operate in that direction. Whenever we attempt to do so we realise that it is pointless, that we are not able to convince people.

That is why anarchists always consider the problem of propaganda critically: Yes, of course, as you see there is a well-stocked table here as is always the case at initiatives or conferences of this kind. There are always our pamphlets, our books. We are laden with papers and are very good at bringing out such publications. But that is not the only kind of work we need to do, and in any case they do not contain elements of counter-information, or if they do it is purely accidental. This work is aimed essentially, or should be, at building an idea or a number of leading ideas, a number of strong ideas.

Let us give just one example. Over the past three or four years an affair has developed that the newspapers have reported using horrible terms like 'tangentopoli' or 'clean hands' [legal procedures in course where many politicians have been sentenced for hav-

Reality has changed. As I said before, they are building a different man, a de-qualified man, and they are building him because they need to build a de-qualified society. They have removed the figure of the worker from the centre of the conception of the political society as it was, after de-qualifying him. In the past the worker bore the greatest brunt of exploitation. That is why it was thought that this social figure would necessarily give birth to the revolution. It is sufficient to think of the Marxist analysis. Marx's Capital is dedicated to the 'liberation' of the worker. When Marx speaks of man, he means the worker. In his analysis of value, he is talking of the work pace; in his analysis of alienation, he is talking about work. There is nothing that does not concern work. But that is because the worker was central to the Marxist analysis at the time when it was developed. The working class could be seen to be the centre of the social structure.

Using different analyses, anarchists also came close to a consideration that the worker's position was the centre of the social world. Think of the anarcho-syndicalist analyses. For the anarchosyndicalists it was a question of taking the concept of trades union struggle to its extreme consequences, freeing it from the narrower dimension of trades union bargaining and developing it right to the realisation of the revolution through the general strike. So according to the anarcho-syndicalists the Society of the future, the free anarchist Society, was to be nothing other than the present Society freed from power but with the same productive structures, no longer in the hands of the capitalists but in the hands of the collective which would manage them in common.

This concept is quite impracticable today for various reasons. First of all, because technological transformation has made it impossible for there to be a simple passage from the present society to the future one we desire to live in. A direct passage would be impossible for the simple reason that it is not possible to use information technology in liberated forms, in a liberatory way. The new technologies and computer technology applications have not

What will they do with such a person? They will use them to bring about all the modifications that are necessary for restructuring capital. They will be useful for a better management of the conditions and relations of the capitalism of tomorrow. And what will these relations be? They will be based on faster and faster change, a call to satisfying non-existent desires, desires that are piloted, determined by small groups that are becoming more and more numerous. This new person is quite the opposite of what we are capable of imagining or desiring, the opposite of quality, creativity, the opposite of real desire, the joy of life, the opposite of all this. How can we fight against the realisation of this technological man? How can we struggle against this situation? Can we wait for a day to come, a great day that will turn the world upside down? What the anarchists of the last century called '*la grande soirée*'? The great evening or the great day — '*le grand jour*' — in which forces no one could foresee would end up taking over, exploding into that social conflict we are all waiting for, called revolution? So everything will change and there will be a world of perfection and joy?

This is a millenarian idea. Now that we are reaching the end of the millennium it could take root again. But conditions have changed. This is not reality, it is not this waiting that interests us. What does interest us is another kind of intervention, a far more modest one, but one that is capable of achieving something. As anarchists we are called to do something. We are called by our own individual responsibility and by what we said earlier. From the moment the idea lights up our mind, not the idea of anarchy, but of justice, freedom, when these ideas illuminate our minds and we see the swindle before us — which today more than ever before we can define a democratic swindle — what can we do? We must set to work, and this setting to work also means organising ourselves. It means creating the conditions of reference and relating between anarchists, conditions that must be other than those of the past.

ing accepted money from the capitalists in exchange for contracts in the public works sectors] and so on. Now what has this operation instilled in people's minds? It has built the opinion that the law is capable of setting things right, of sentencing politicians, changing conditions, so can take us from the old concepts typical of the first Italian Republic to the new ones of the Second Republic. This opinion, this process, is clearly very useful. For example it has allowed the emergence of a 'new' power elite to take the place of the old. New up to a point, but with certain characteristics and sad rehashes of old habits and personages. This is the way opinion functions.

Now, consider comparing this process of opinion-making, which is of considerable advantage to power alone, to the construction of an idea-force that might be an in-depth analysis of the concept of justice. The difference is abyssal. But what is right? For example, it was certainly right for many, and we also considered it right ourselves, for ex-socialist party leader Craxi to be forced to remain locked up in his villa in Tunisia. The whole thing has been quite amusing, it even made us laugh, made us feel good because it is quite nice when pigs at that level end up being put out of circulation. But is that real justice? For example, Andreotti is in difficulty. It seems he kissed Riina [mafia boss] on the cheek.

Such news certainly makes us smile, makes us feel better, because a pig like Andreotti was annoying even at a simple physical level, just seeing him on TV was enough. But what is this idea of justice? Judges for the prosecution Di Pietro and Borrelli have a horde of supporting fans. Millions of people have been drawn into this process of uniforming opinion.

Is the concept of justice we need to ponder on any different? What should it lead to? It should lead us to recognising that if Craxi or Andreotti arc responsible then people like Di Pietro or Borrelli are responsible to the same extent. Because if the former are politicians, the others are all magistrates. The concept of justice means fixing a demarcation line between those who support and defend

power and those who are against it. If the very existence of power is unjust and if all attempts, some of which we have just seen, reveal themselves to be no more than self-justifying swindles, any man of power, more or less democratic as he might be, always stands on the wrong side of justice no matter what he does.

To build such a concept of justice obviously means to form an idea, an idea you don't find in the newspapers, that isn't gone into in the classrooms or university auditoriums, which cannot become an element of opinion or lead people to vote. In fact, such an idea leads to internal conflict. Because before the tribunal of one's self one asks, 'But I, with my idea of social justice, how do I see it when what Di Pietro does seems good? Am I being taken for a ride too? Am I also an instrument of opinion, a terminal of the great processes for maintaining power, becoming not just their slave but also their accomplice?'

We have finally got there. We have reached the point of our own responsibility. Because if it is true that for anarchists there is no difference between theory and action, as soon as the idea of social justice lights up in us, illuminates our brain even for a split second, it will never be able to extinguish itself again. Because no matter what we think we will feel guilty, will feel we are accomplices, accomplices to a process of discrimination, repression, genocide, death, a process we will never be able to feel detached from again. How could we define ourselves revolutionaries and anarchists otherwise? What freedom would we be supporting if we were to give our complicity to the assassins in power?

You see how different and critical the situation is for whoever succeeds, through deep analysis of reality or simply by chance or misfortune, in letting an idea as clear as the idea of justice penetrate their brain? There are many such ideas. For example, the idea of freedom is similar. Anyone who thinks about what freedom actually is even for a moment will never again be able to content themselves by simply doing something to slightly extend the freedom of the situations they are living in. From that moment on they

will feel guilty and will try to do something to alleviate their sense of suffering. They will fear they have done wrong by not having done anything till now, and from that moment on their lives will change completely.

Basically, what does the State want from the formation of opinion? What does power want? Yes, of course, it wants to create mass opinion because from that they are able to realise certain operations such as voting, the formation of power groups and so on. But that is not all they want. They want our consensus. They want our approval. And consensus is gained through precise instruments, especially those of a cultural nature. For example, school is one of the reservoirs from which consensus is realised and the future intellectual, and not just intellectual, workforce is built.

Today capitalism requires a different kind of person to those it required in the past. Up until recently there was a need for people with professional capacities, a pride in this capacity and particular qualifications. The situation is quite different now. The world of work requires a very modest qualification level whereas qualities that did not exist and were even inconceivable in the past such as flexibility, adaptability, tolerance, the capacity to intervene at meetings, etc. are required in their place.

Huge production units based on assembly lines for example now use robots or are built on the conceptual basis of islands, small groups working together who know each other and control each other and so on. This kind of mentality is not only found in the factory. It is not just a 'new worker' they are building, but a 'new man'; a flexible person with modest ideas, rather opaque in their desires, with considerably reduced cultural levels, impoverished language, standardised reading, a limited capacity to think and a great capacity to make quick yes or no decisions. They know how to choose between two possibilities: a yellow button, a red button, a black button, a white button. This is the kind of mentality they are building. And where are they building it? At school, but also in everyday life.