Why a Vanguard?

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The ideas that follow are aimed at going into the problem of the relations between the movement of the exploited and the revolutionary anarchist movement.

The conclusion is very simple and constitutes the starting point of a reflection that we are proposing to all comrades: it is not within the enclosure of the specific anarchist movement that one works for the revolution, but outside in the reality of struggles, which at this moment do not see us present. In this sense the anarchist movement still has a long way to go. In the face of the urgency of the situation it has become imperative for all sincere revolutionary anarchist comrades to reflect on the ways and conditions of organising oneself to contribute to the widening, in the libertarian sense, of the present situation of crises and discomfort.

The time for hesitation and waiting is over. May whoever is available for the revolutionary struggle seek his or her comrades and not indulge in waiting for a sign or clarification on the part of the specific movement.

AMB

Why a vanguard?

The problem of the vanguard has been gone into by all conscious revolutionaries past and present. They fear its dangers and try to see what causes it and how to eliminate it or attenuate its effects.

The problem is far more serious for anarchists. They do not accept the political expedients that other revolutionaries end up justifying in their haste to take power.

All the same, anarchists also end up producing vanguards but they are careful not to call them such, a word they detest. But we have no fig leaf with which to cover up reality, and if this includes structures that are the same or similar to those of the authoritarians, it is pointless to try to conceal the fact simply by using different words.

Is a vanguard necessary then?

There is no simple answer to this. Anarchists have tended to bury their heads in the sand until now, hoping to solve the problem through the use of metaphors.

We feel we must take a step forward and risk upsetting those that are obstinately holding on to their positions like the same old octopus on the same old rock.

Many have cut the problem short by simply stating that there is a need for a vanguard. Pushing the underlying ideology — always present in anarchism — in an authoritarian direction, they pull their sleeves up and set to work. With the aid of some extremely distilled and refined theories, they start to build mysterious constructions that are maxims of control and selection.

Such a position does not differ much from those who, categorically denying that there is any such thing as a vanguard in anarchism, refuse to see reality as it is.

This tendency — usually wrapped up in humanistic rhetoric bordering on nebulous idealism — is the sworn enemy of the former which it accuses of being the most sinister Leninism camouflaged as anarchism. On the other hand, the more sharp-witted part of the movement, aware of the difficulties involved in trying to justify some of the leadership, replace the term "vanguard" with "active minority" and similar euphemisms.

However, the problem is not just a question of words. We are not interested in substituting one term with another and explaining why, but are trying to get to the root of the problems that such a concept leads to.

And the question does not change if we call the "thing" a vanguard or an active minority.

What is this thing then? What is a revolutionary vanguard?

The answer looks simple: it is an organic whole composed of the individuals that make it up. This organisation tends to cut itself off from and impose itself upon the revolutionary movement that produced it.

Let us look at this in stages.

There are many ways to justify the need for a specific organisation to take on certain problems that mass organisations cannot solve. Obviously, those who make up this organisation must have three attributes: a) knowledge; b) commitment; c) time. Power establishes itself on the basis of authoritativeness rather than authority in the narrow sense of the word. We are talking of revolutionary organisations in general, but let us not lose sight of those we are particularly interested in examining, anarchist organisations. It is precisely in the latter that elements of authoritativeness predominate over authority, leaving the underlying problem intact: that of the growth and consolidation of an organisation (therefore of a group of people) that exerts control over the rest of the movement.

The revolution is eminently an organisational event, so it is no wonder that a process of organisational superstructuring comes about when base organisations multiply. This could quite well be limited (at least in the early stages) by pointing to the questions that such an organisation should concern itself with and controlling it through a recall of its delegates. We shall see why such expedients (limitation of tasks and recall of delegates) constitute very fragile bulwarks, and how these are often simply used to solve consciences, i.e. as alibis, rather than as instruments with which to limit power as such.

When the counterrevolution lets loose, this group tends to close in on itself. Repression and clandestinity have the effect of making it turn into a militarised group which (suddenly or gradually) loses its relationship with the old base organisations, the first to succumb to the repression. At other times the predominant organisational group splits into a number of separate or coordinated groups that — still limited in number — carry on the struggle, often drawing in those from the base organisation who prefer to go into clandestinity. We are looking at an extreme situation here that reduces the value of the work done at other times when the counterrevolution leaves the revolutionary movement relatively in peace. But the problems arising from this radicalisation are none other than those that already existed, now in a more rarified, obvious, form.

The conditions leading to the formation of the vanguard are therefore linked to the development of revolutionary activity itself. An organisation formed of men and women — the best available — emerges, and along with it the danger of its beginning to reason independently in keeping with the logic of all organisations, their main priority becoming their own survival.

Such a conclusion would seem to implicate the inevitability of a vanguard, yet, on the contrary, I believe that it is possible to go beyond a minority logic. However, in order for this to become clear a number of points need to be considered.

The organisational question

Nothing is possible without organisation. Human life would stop and everything would fall into chaos. Organisation is indispensable to man to such an extent that any improvement in the latter, even if carried out by tyrants, is to be considered something positive. The very idea of progress would never have come about had organisation not been essential to man.

In this sense, if history is the development of anything it is the development of something organised.

The power structure is a fairly refined organisation aimed at attaining ends for the benefit of a minority. The majority are engaged in bringing about these ends. But we cannot deny that the interests of the minority also hold certain positive aspects for the majority. The latter would rebel or die otherwise and the former's aims would not be reached.

The power structure is full of expedients for obtaining the maximum whilst giving the minimum. It elaborates these expedients and puts them into effect, modifying them from time to time in relation to the struggle carried out by the majority, i.e. the exploited.

The latter, as a result of various — all dramatic — experiences of struggle, have developed organisations of their own to make the clash more effective. These have gradually entered the logic of exploitation and become an integral part of it, coinciding with power's discovery of the untenability of absolutism and the idiocy of fascist irrationalism.

This is how democratic power was born, an organisation that continues to exploit the majority to the benefit of the minority but does so using the majority's own organisations of defence.

Moreover, what has made this possible is the fact that the defence organisations of the majority have nearly always come into effect after becoming legalised.

But organisational activity should not necessarily be seen as something that is built from the outside by specialists who make decisions according to their own aims. This interpretation contains two basic errors: what we could call the biological error, and the functionalist one. According to this way of thinking an organisation must structure itself more or less like an organism (have a head and limbs, therefore a hierarchy) and fulfil the essential requirements of efficiency and functionality. If the exploited majority cannot defend themselves because they are dispersed in single units (like the cells of organic tissue), we must put these cells together and build a body with a precious structure (i.e. trades unions and unions in general) suited to the aims in view, to oppose the bosses in the process of exploitation and to defend the majority.

The justification for this is the concept that, because the bosses' structure is monolithic, the defence structure should also be so.

The biological and functionalist analogy also dominated in the field of political defence, as party structures increased in importance alongside the decline of absolutist States.

The justification, the monolithicity of the State.

This is all quite pathetic. The great irony of history lies in the fact that it was power itself to decide the terms of the huge defence organisations. These terms were produced on an organic and functional basis, often as the involuntary consequence of certain modifications within the power structure itself. Clearly an organism of defence is a product of a particular historical period, and nearly always consolidates in a precise relationship with the power structure that conditions it and renders it possible.

An incredible number of comrades maintain that they are revolutionary yet insist on the validity of using the defence structures of the exploited. They see the latter as instruments of struggle, unaware of the intimate relationship of dependency that exists between them and the structures of power.

But history has contributed to clarifying this question. Each time the exploited have moved from defence to attack and a revolutionary mechanism has sprung into effect, other kinds of organisational structure have arisen.

The problem of the great defence organisations of the exploited is not the fact that they exist — something that is natural and ineliminable — but precisely the defensive dimension that they have adopted. That is why they "copy" the organisations of the adversary and use the same logic.

On the other hand, organisations of attack do not reproduce the biological functionalism of the defensive ones. These organisational forms have no intention of becoming a great monolithic structure, so allow the process of breaking up to continue. They do not want to reproduce the model of the adversary by using the same logic. It is true that organisations of defence can also be mobilised to attack but this turns out to be a military-style clash that might look revolutionary but which can have no other outcome than the persistence of the old power or the birth of a new one, possibly more tyrannical than the first.

Organisations of attack, on the other hand, are born on the basis of a social logic that takes people's needs, the level of exploitation and the extent of radicalisation that the clash has reached into account.

These organisations do not suffer from functionalist illusions. They cannot be improved upon, they do not hope to "grow". Neither do they put themselves in the logic of a "dialogue" with power. They are for the destruction of all power from the moment they appear, so in their very logic they are already "complete" in themselves. They can of course perfect themselves from the point of view of tactics, the preparation of their individual components or aspects of the military clash. But as far as the organisational aspect is concerned there is nothing to be improved upon and vice versa. They are beyond the logic of power. They are "outlaws".

Not seeking quantitative growth they have no need for a "head" or "limbs". They orientate themselves towards the reality of exploitation, emerging in their organisational completeness at the moment in which they attack power. They do not have one function among others, but have the "definitive function" of destroying power.

It is not important to describe here what forms these organisations of attack have taken in the history of the exploited (councils, soviets, committees, etc.), or might take in the near future. Nor are we interested in discussing an important and immediately obvious characteristic of these organisations, autonomy.

On the contrary, we feel that it is necessary to reflect upon two things: a) that these organisations never lose sight of the individual (that is also an organisation); b) in the destructive moment they become a model for the construction of the future society.

Now we have acquired a new problem. The single individual is an organisation, or rather is the fundamental organisation. Here the confusion concerning an apparent contradiction between individualism and anarchist communism disappears. While the former sometimes adopts attitudes that are strangely absurd (the defence of small property, the will to power, a disdain for communist life, etc.), most of this is no more than isolated attitudes that have had little contact with the reality of the struggles of the exploited. A typical case is that of the humanists who recognise themselves in anarchism but, hindered by their idealistic interpretation of the vicissitudes of man, end up losing the essential foundation of the exploiter/

exploited relationship. They bring the attributes of the old God down to earth and turn them into a new myth, quite similar to the old one that only served the designs of power.

This kind of individualism is clearly a distortion of the more rational doctrines of egoism. It denies the concept of organisation and tends to see man as continually realising himself within an animalistic dimension of the struggle for life. It sees the communist dimension as the negation of human development, the sacrifice of the individual to the good society. It fights for the liberation of the individual outside a communitarian perspective, avoiding the fundamental premise that the slavery of one single individual in the world is also my own.

On the contrary, when individualism is seen correctly it starts from the concept that, although simple and basic from the point of view of social dynamics, the individual is already a complex organisation. This organisation can establish precise relationships with other organisation-individuals and is capable of changing or regulating them. It can even realise itself in the absolute sacrifice, the conscious negation of itself — death — when this seems necessary in order to overturn the exploiter-exploited relationship that renders the organisation-individual incomplete and unhappy.

Supreme egoism, i.e. autonomy, is the organisational perfectionment of the individual, a precise relationship that does not infringe upon other organisation-individuals.

A proper exposition of this problem is extremely important for anarchism. It leads to a clearer vision of the struggle against exploitation, even when this comes about in situations that are confusing or in not quite orthodox organisational forms. When it comes to defence it should be said that anarchist structures often condemn any form of struggle that is produced independently of themselves, considering them to be individualist in the negative sense of the word and branding them "objectively provocatory".

For individualism, the essential point is that the individual is an autonomous organisation that usually reacts against what has been established by power, often by working out its own precepts, clarifying itself and taking the initiative. At that moment a precise moral event sets in motion: the individual, no longer an unconscious instrument in the hands of power, acquires an autonomous perspective that is of an essentially organisational character.

The other aspect of the organisational moment we have defined "attack" is its preparation as the destructive instrument to act upon the reality of exploitation, and as a model to build from once this relationship is abolished.

Objective conditions push the great mass of exploited to look for these organisational models, which are impeded by the power of the adversary. If the heavy power structure starts to show signs of weakness at some point, needs and problems must be faced differently. Usually, in building forms of attack, the mass also build forms to solve the problems of survival. The latter are very significant because they are based on communist relations.

The illusion of quantity

The main element of the organisational structuring of defence is quantitative growth. This has been conditioned by the logic of power.

The greater the numbers, the more an organisation is considered to be significant, strong, well known, important. In this sense, if the power structure is the stronger organisation, if it is at its peak and covers every manifestation of associated life, any organisation that intends to contrast it and represent the rights of the great majority of exploited must aim to be as strong as possible.

At first glance such statements seem quite unexceptional. And so they are if one puts oneself in the logic of power. If we want to defend ourselves from an evil force we need to oppose it with a good force i.e., one that is, if not equally strong, at least strong enough to scare it. But in this way one is putting oneself in the logic of power, unaware that any significant growth in numbers simply shifts the class relationship without actually putting the latter in question. It does not abolish classes.

By channelling revolutionary and reformist organisations towards the quantitative illusion, power has obtained one great result. It has equalised the latter at the organisational level, reducing differences to whoever shouts loudest. And we well know how he that shouts loudest is often the one most easily disposed to stopping shouting all of a sudden, or to start shouting for the opposite side.

Revolutionary organisations cannot grow quantitatively. If they do, that being in the logic of power, the difference between revolutionaries and reformists becomes no more than a question of semantics, something that power does not fear.

Of course, quantity does not catch the reformists unaware. Betrayal is implicit in their discourse and so is their insertion into relations that are managed by power. Now dominated by the structures of exploitation, they act out the role assigned to them in the modern liberal-social setup.

On the other hand, even revolutionaries in good faith fall prey to the quantitative illusion. That is the point that interests us most, which we want to go into here.

A revolutionary comrade must be considered to be in good faith until proved otherwise. Questions of clarification and criticism must never be at a personal level but must focus on the comrade's choices and the consequences that they have on the whole organisation. In this sense the comrade's good faith must be put to the test through a decisive action that gets to the root of things and does not stop at appearances, in other words through a penetrating action that is not limited to the field of abstract revolutionary ideology.

The quantitative illusion is very important for authoritarian comrades, but always within certain limits. They realise that they are starting off on the wrong foot and that it is not possible to go beyond something that would merely like to become part of real situations of struggle. Unfortunately, they often prefer to wait for that to come about (i.e. be facilitated) by the precipitation of events. They proceed to build strong organisations that are revolutionary in appearance alone, being in fact organisations of defence, therefore losers before they start. Numerical growth in the latter leads comrades to foster this illusion. It makes them feel strong and secure. So they grow steadfastly in that direction, which is precisely what power wants: the acceptance of an innocuous expression of revolution as something that is quantitative and nothing else, so it is easily pulled back into the logic of the power system.

The illusion of quantity is absolutely critical for anarchist organisations, which cannot become useless, sterile and counterproductive, their growth simply quantitative. Nor would

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it be plausible for them to simply wait for events to precipitate. Anarchists would not be able to act in something that is structured as a defence organisation, as they would not be willing to transform it into a pyramidal structure. At a radical point in the struggle when events precipitate, they would be forced to put their organisation to the test, dismember it and take it back to the elementary form that it should have had at the start. Much of the history of anarchism can be seen from this optic: the failure of the Russian revolution, the authoritarian involution of the Spanish one.

Many anarchists are now playing the part of Penelope, weaving what they know they will have to unstitch, precisely at the moment when the aims they are struggling for come about. Apart from a few marginal efforts, the present organisational forms of the anarchist movement are no different from any other organisation that is far from the reality of the struggle. These organisations must accept the quantitative logic if they do not want to seem anachronistic (or elitist), even though they know that such a logic inevitably leads to their denying the basic principles of anarchism, or to the complete undoing of what they have just built.

If one holds on to the illusion of quantity, the role of the vanguard must unavoidably be accepted. Authoritarians have nothing against this. Anarchists, on the other hand, have a great deal against it. Unfortunately, this being 'against' the vanguard often turns into a sterile debate, the argument often turning to the difference between authoritarian structures and libertarian ones. This point deserves to be gone into further.

Authoritarian group and libertarian one

At this point we want to go into the concept of the group. Up until now we have been speaking about organisation, comparing various organisations that are objectively different but which all borrow the logic of defence, therefore of power. These organisations are different in many aspects but share one fundamental one, their capacity to be used by power. Organisations for economic defence, political defence, reformist organisations and revolutionary organisations are all the same — words are meaningless — if they operate in forms that are outside the struggle.

However, within that uniformity there is a difference between a structure by groups and a structure by sections or other synonyms that usually characterise unions and parties. If we look closely we can find a semblance of reality, still external to the reality of the struggle but which claims to make a difference. The structure made up of groups considers itself to be libertarian and accuses the other of being authoritarian.

Basically, it is easy to make this accusation as it is welcomed by those responsible for the authoritarian parties and organisations themselves. In fact, central committees, hierarchies and other similar devices are not concealed but are justified by a series of discourses on the need for the leader, representation, a transitional period and other fantasies that are not worth mentioning here because they are as old as the hills.

On the other hand, a structure by groups is seen as the basis of every libertarian organisation. This is correct, but we need to know what kind of groups we are talking about.

Nothing prevents authoritarian organisations from being based on groups, or the existence of actual authoritarian groups. In fact the libertarian structure should not be considered a typical group structure but rather one that is characterised from within and distinguishes itself from the other kinds.

The authoritarian group has a leader and a hierarchical microstructure. The leader makes the most important decisions without consulting the group members, and makes them one at a time in such a way that the others never know what the next decision will be. This situation of uncertainty is what makes it possible for the leader's authority to become permanent, and from time to time the latter is called upon to set out tasks for all the others. Nothing prevents vanguardist organisations from structuring themselves this way. Moreover, this is often quite a normal state of affairs in situations of clandestinity.

The libertarian group does not have a leader and does not have an internal hierarchical structure. The distribution of tasks is decided upon collectively. The line of behaviour is decided by all of the components of the group and members can choose to carry out one task rather than another, always with common agreement. The state of uncertainty that exists in the face of a new event does not paralyse or traumatize anyone and does not require the intervention of a "specialist", in that each individual is already aware of the situation and is prepared to face it along with all the others.

If we are assuming that only authoritarian groups can constitute a vanguard, we must look at the conditions that would prevent a libertarian group from producing one.

Just because the libertarian group does not have a leader does not mean that it is not capable of producing a vanguard. In itself this simple fact is not alarming, it becomes serious when the group is operating in a situation outside the struggle. Let us see why.

Above all, let us see how leaders do emerge within such groups. We have said that decisions are worked out as openly as possible. Everybody participates. But not everybody has the same level of preparation. It therefore transpires that discussions move in the direction of one or more particular points that correspond to the ideas of those who are better prepared. In other words, the components of the group start to divide, not on the basis of their own ideas, which can often be quite vague or superficial, but on the basis of some interpretative lines supplied by the better prepared elements. Then there is a passage from polarisation to concentration, usually because the theses of the leaders (by now identifiable) reach some agreement, i.e. divergences are blunted in order to reach unanimity. In extreme cases, where a concentration of opinion is not possible, a fracture and consequent separation results.

The problem of the formation of a majority and minority, or the libertarian equivalent of the same, is not relevant here. What concerns us is that the polarisation of opinions comes about on the basis of interpretative lines that are supplied by some elements (a minority within the group) constituted by the leaders. It should be added that these elements are usually the ones that frequent the group most assiduously, participate in all the work, engage themselves totally. That often coincides with a certain level of freedom from other kinds of work that are necessary in order to live. Without referring to the extreme case of revolutionary professionalism, we could say that the leaders of libertarian groups are usually comrades with a certain amount of time at their disposal, which they dedicate to

the life of the group. The group unavoidably takes on their physiognomy, their cultural and social characteristics that involuntarily but consistently select themselves.

The other great problem is that, alongside the existence of leaders, it is often possible to identify the existence of "problematics" that are introduced to the group by the same, then submitted to the process of democratic scrutiny for discussion, etc. In this way the choice of methods of struggle, the theoretical foundations and various political positions are dealt with outside the group then, with a typically paternalistic process, everything is then discussed with all the comrades. The group thus becomes an objective, abstract entity for the individuals that make it up, as its relations only enter the reality of some of them. A formal difference in the style of command within the group turns out to be even more conditioned than the authoritarian one. In other words we are faced with an essentially authoritarian structure that is far more efficient than the authoritarian group itself. The latter always has the problem of how to overcome individual uncertainty in the case of having to act in the leader's absence. The libertarian group, on the other hand, reaches an envious homogeneity of decision by acting as we have just seen, although there is little to be envied at the subjective level.

The worst question they have to face is how to pilot problems instead of confronting the group with them directly. Now, such a situation is impossible if the group is acting directly within the struggle when, as we shall see further on, a whole series of other problematics arise. So, given that the group is acting in an external organisation, tied as we have said to the illusory perspective of quantity, it becomes indispensable for someone within the group to carry out the fundamental tasks. On the contrary, in the case where the group is acting within struggles, the function of the leader is quite simply that of orientation on the grounds of his wider preparation and availability of time, not that of choosing the problems to be discussed.

This distinction is of the greatest importance. It marks the watershed between the fictitious movement and the real movement.

The relationship between groups: the vertical structure and the horizontal one

A group, in that it is an elemental structure of a wider organisational reality, would be insignificant if it were to remain isolated from other groups. It would contain all the defects of an external organisation without managing to have any effect on a wider range of opinion.

If the group consolidates on the basis of affinity emerging from the ideas and opinions of some of the leaders, as well as its geographical situation, which also exerts an influence, that does not mean that it cannot develop a wider organisational base. It can establish relations with other groups — those not too far from its own positions — based on some of the theses put forward by the leaders.

These relations can come about vertically in the case of authoritarian groups, or horizontally in the case of libertarian ones. It is the horizontal structure that we are interested in looking at here, as this is characteristic of anarchist groups.

Various groups federate or keep in contact in one way or another, supporting each other in the minimum common intention that can be drawn from a few basic principles and theoretical points worked out in advance. Even a loose agreement concerning these ideas and principles is sufficient to guarantee the persistence of the horizontal structure. No one group predominates over any other, no group claims to carry out the function of leader, and no group makes a decision concerning the others without getting in touch with the rest of the federation or informal union, who then state what they want. They can also use common instruments such as papers or commissions. These are edited or compiled by various groups, or by one single group, following a discussion among delegates, using various procedures (ratification of the group, recall of delegates, etc.) in order to try to guarantee the structure as far as possible, keeping it horizontal.

Things are not quite like that in reality. Inevitable processes favour the formation of a group of leaders that take over the federation or union of groups, pushing them towards the basic interpretation of the underlying thesis which, according to them, is the only one that is valid for all the comrades. This is not reached directly. As we have seen, each group produces its leaders, usually one or two, maximum three. Very often their preparation and availability are greater than that of the others. In this way a true leader emerges. We know how the retrieval of opinion works, the process of decision-making within groups. The phenomenon of polarisation is overcome, often in order to try to give the group uniformity and cohesion but when taken to a wider level (geographically), these phenomena do not fail to reappear.

It can be instructive to read accounts of debates or reports written by delegates from individual groups to see what we are talking about. The polarisation of ideas is quite evident. Usually only the leaders are present at wider meetings, each one of whom is more "inside" the problems of their own particular group. More often than not it is they who have worked out the ideas that the group has ended up attributing to itself. Hence a great divergence on whatever problem is being faced, with a strong possibility of never reaching any precise conclusions.

Usually a broad program is established, be it old or new, with propositions that are general enough for everyone to agree with. Care is taken to limit the program to general principles, otherwise the internal contradictions represented by the various interpretations would be irreconcilable.

Even if the structure remains horizontal, if the revocable delegate tries to avoid any form of professionalism, if the debate within the structure is always alive — in fact, the further it finds itself from the various points of struggle the more virulent it gets — that does not mean that spontaneous formations acting along the lines of a vanguard do not appear.

So now we have a series of groups that organise in a structure that is outside the struggle. By this fact alone they see themselves as the conscious vanguard of something that is considered to be unconsciousness, therefore in need of being approached and receiving clarification. Propaganda and proselytism are important for this enlightened kind of van-

guard. Within the latter, through an inevitable process of selection, an even more restricted vanguard is formed, a group of leaders that act starting from certain decisions concerning basic ideas and the interpretation of individual problems that do not always come from a wider base but are often elaborated in specific places, i.e. at meetings of the restricted vanguard.

One thus becomes aware of the extreme apex of an organised whole, that takes on the task of piloting an instrument for acting on the mass in one way or another.

As far as the organised structure as a whole is concerned, its reduction to a vanguard comes about because it is detached from the real struggle and because it is seen as an instrument by the leaders who want to use it as such.

At first glance it would seem that such things regard authoritarian structures rather than libertarian ones, because, as we said they go against the latter's aims and intentions. Each and every militant that enters a libertarian group is making a choice, not just on the basis of an abstract program but also because he or she wants to live differently, with a way of working together that is free from that absurd situation of authoritarian groups where only the leader or leaders know what is to be done and everyone else waits to take orders. When it actually comes to it, reality takes charge of changing opinions one way or another.

Authoritarian groups are finding it more and more difficult to hold on to the classic centralised structure. Leaders are conceding a certain freedom of action to their subalterns, even if processes of reification, i.e. the transformation of the organisational apparatus into a "thing" are always in act, considerably influencing the behaviour of the individual militants.

In libertarian groups, as we have seen, the idyllic situation of maximum freedom of expression is impeded by the lack of preparation and scarce availability of most of the members. For this reason a certain decision-making power ends up in the hands of a few leaders.

This situation is the same as the former in appearance alone. In reality we are looking at two very different forms of degeneration that lead to different consequences. In the first case, i.e. in the authoritarian structure, the process of reification is such that individual militants become so integrated with the organisation that it becomes inconceivable for them to imagine that the latter could make a mistake. Hence their failure to question orders from above. The structure must be right, precisely because of some of its internal, quite irrational, characteristics. Its reflection as an organised structure cannot be wrong, in that they live the same life as the organisation. They personify it in a way, giving it a human semblance. The personality cult and all its consequences are a logical conclusion of this direction.

In the second case, i.e. in the horizontal, libertarian structure, methods of discussion, a minimum of decency and various other elements contribute to preventing a reification of the organisation. Even many elements of the base who have nothing to say on certain arguments do not accept the typically authoritarian principle that the organisation is always right. In this case the leaders' authority should more correctly be called authoritativeness, although the use of a different word does not alter the consequences of the phenomenon.

It should be added that there quite often exists what is know as an esprit de corps. Militants of a libertarian organisation should be free from such absurdities. Yet reality shows us how one often becomes a prisoner of them. The militant at the base of the organised structure sees the latter in a certain way, that usually coincides with the way the leader

that influences it sees it. By simply accepting this situation, he cannot see his organisation at the same level as others do. He sees something better in it, something more fitting to the principles he vaguely feels are close to his "truth", which are codified succinctly for the non-initiated. The leader is even closer to identifying with the organisation. He feels there is something definitive in it, feels it is "his" to a much greater degree than the simple militant does. Whereas for the latter the intermediary of the leader was necessary, for him the relationship is direct. He feels the pulsations directly. All this leads to his being extremely indulgent towards his own organisation and extremely critical of others.

An irrational evaluation of the organisation one belongs to can lead to strange situations. A great deal of effort is made to expand, perfect and fortify a structure, without analysing whether it corresponds to the needs of the struggle that it is supposed to be involved in. All kinds of excuses are invented to camouflage the priority given to internal work compared to that beyond the organisation. It is said that it is not the right moment to do this or that, while it is always the time for the work of internal growth, in that it is always the moment for waiting and preparing to defend oneself from the attacks of the exploiters. The outside is no longer seen as a field of struggle, a specific situation that can be analysed, or as the necessary condition for preventing abnormal growth or sterile conformity to past models, but only for finding new militants. Proselytism is the most important part of the organisation's activities. In a few extreme cases the struggle, any struggle whatsoever, is not carried out on the basis of the positive consequences that it might determine in the exploited masses, but on the basis of the propaganda that it might create for the organisation. Hence a position of stalemate in the relation of the struggle between exploiter and exploited is reached. If the relation concerns the problem of abortion, for example, the latter is not faced in terms of how the problem concerns the mass of exploited, but only in view of an outcome in quantitative terms, and what the negative consequences of going in the opposite direction would be for the organisation.

Authoritarian boss and libertarian leader

The first sets himself up as a constant point of reference. He gets his authority from the position he occupies within the authoritarian structure, a position that has — usually — been gained through total dedication to the organisation itself, as well as his considerable competence and preparation. He comes to be considered the interpreter of the will of the organisation, therefore, indirectly, given that the latter is considered holder of the truth, he is considered interpreter and holder of the truth. The irrational relationship at the root of a militant's belonging to an authoritarian structure, consolidates itself in his relationship with the direct head. The indirect leader, the one who places himself at the top of the pyramid, then comes to be invested with those charismatic forms that have a very strong irrational content. Because there is no way to control the validity of his work, apart from through the action of the intermediate leaders, the supreme head becomes more a symbol than anything else, a symbol dispenser of charisma, i.e. the truth.

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Here it is necessary to point out the great difference that there is between this situation and the counterrevolutionary authoritarian structure. This is a delicate question. Objectively speaking an authoritarian structure is always counterrevolutionary, because it always tries to put obstacles in the way of ultimate liberation. But it should be distinguished from the structures deliberately created by the bosses to reach their aims. In this sense, let's say, a fascist organisational structure gives rise to certain hierarchical relations that are flights from freedom, each single component grasps the charisma of the head because he is scared of the freedom that he could find elsewhere, because he has that special petit bourgeois vision of life that makes him take refuge and comfort in the fixed structures of authoritarianism. For the fascist, the acceptation of the authoritarian structure is not a concession, it is a point of stability: his interior conflict, typically existential, is resolved in the total and definitive delegation, in the flight. The other possibility, that he vaguely sees, the possibility of living free, scares him because the schema of tradition, family, honour, homeland, and other such rubbish, suffocate him, making him see freedom as chaos without rules, in which old the old ghosts, that he has always run away from, equality in the first place, would end up multiplying.

The authoritarian comrade is a comrade who intends to consciously make the choice of freedom. He is not afraid, in fact all of his action is aimed at breaking with the past, with tradition. Acceptance of the authoritarian structure is the lesser of two evils for the militant who naively convinces himself that nothing lasting can be obtained without sacrifice. For this reason he is ready for the extreme sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own freedom. Herein lies the tragedy. A person struggling for freedom ends up sacrificing the latter in the illusion that he is continuing to struggle for it. Even the acceptance of charisma is always a mediated fact that involves a process of "snobbery", self-importance, little moral blackmails with oneself. He usually starts off seeing the leader as a "comrade", accepting him as one who is more prepared and more aware. He would never admit to a direct charismatic process. Then, as he is gradually absorbed into the authoritarian structure he realises that any possibility of control from the base is minimal. Next there is his accusation of superficial snobbery. He finally ends up taking orders and sacrificing himself to the structure itself which, as an indissoluble whole, he identifies with freedom and truth.

Now let us look at the situation of the libertarian leader. He should not become a point of reference. If he is, that has happened against his will, as a direct consequence of his having more free time and due to his greater involvement and preparation. As far as he is concerned, one could speak of authoritativeness rather than authority. He cannot be accused of interpreting the will of the organisation as the latter is composed of the wills of all the members. Finally, as the organisation itself is not considered the depository of truth, the leader towards whom some militants turn in no way interprets or spreads the truth.

In actual fact, considerable modifications do occur within this schema. The leader does end up becoming a point of reference, otherwise the diversity of opinions within the structure would be enormous and make it almost impossible to reach any decision. This organisation also ends up being seen by militants in a deformed, irrational way as "their organisation" due to the simple fact that they chose it as the organisation which, although not carrier of the truth, is almost certainly the one that gets closer to that than any other. Consequently,

even if the leader is not the interpreter or holder of truth he can in a sense be considered something similar, a comrade to have faith in, so much so as to accept his conclusions even if one does not fully grasp them. All this comes about in the hope that we too will manage to see clearly in the future in order to put the comrade, who for the time being serves as a point of reference, into a proper critical dimension. This awaiting better moments when we will all have time, when our preparation is more accurate and detailed, also conceals renunciation and accommodation. It conceals the acceptance of a situation that it is very difficult to alter, which we are not really interested in going into as such.

Then there is the question of the relationship between leaders. Another delicate problem. If the clash between authoritarian leaders is taken for granted as a result of the ranks that are built within the vertical structure, one should not be able to say the same thing about libertarian leaders. They also have clashes of opinion, find themselves opposing those who diverge from their own point of view, have to overcome organisational obstacles caused by the different tendencies, but the means that they have recourse to should be different.

On the contrary, one often sees that the means employed are not so different at all. The libertarian leader cannot let predominance over the tendency he represents escape him, without risking the very negation of the tendency and a distortion of the relationship with the part of the base that he represents. There might be a hint of a relationship of exchange, or reciprocal influence, between base and leader within the wider organised structure. That does not alter the fact that the precise interest of the leader, even a libertarian one, emerges to seal this relationship, protecting it from the influence of other tendencies that might threaten the clarity of his own position.

Hence the clash with other leaders. An idea of the intensity of the clash is given by the rush for commissions and tasks to be carried out within the organisation. Nothing changes because these commissions are unpaid and produce a considerable burden of work and fatigue: they are recompensed by influence and solidity. One could say that the more widely a leader's activity is developed within the organisation, the clearer and less attackable his point of reference becomes.

One should not generalise however. In the libertarian organisational structure, the formation of militants makes it possible for there to be a constant exchange of ideas in circulation that ends up emarginating tendencies that become crystallized. Then the comrade or comrades who identify with that crystallized tendency, even when they keep in touch with certain instruments such as papers, reviews, commissions and other things, still end up creating a vacuum around themselves.

The libertarian organisation, even the one farthest from the struggle, cannot fail to face the problem of aims and methods. And the discussion of methods ends up creating relationships within the organisation that render possible a debate which, although sterile at times, often leads to unexpected results in other organisations.

It should be added that comrades in the libertarian organisation are there by their own free choice. Generally speaking, belonging to a libertarian organisation, even those with quite unclear perspectives, involves risk, sacrifice, awareness of these risks and sacrifices and a fairly clear evaluation of the reasons that determined such a choice. At any level whatsoever, anarchist militants are indisputably militants who can make decisions and question

any doubts about positions or tendencies that are not quite tenable (at least in their opinion). This fact, which often gives rise to arguments, endless discussions, splits and conflict between tendencies and has been considered the weak point of anarchism, is actually one of its points of strength and vitality. Obtuse uniformity would kill any lively tendency in favour of the grey will of the winning side.

An attempt to examine the character structure of the libertarian militant

Anarchist methodology vaguely gives us a model of a certain kind of militant. More often than not this indication is not gained from the reality of intervention in struggle, but from an idealisation of the latter.

Moreover, it is possible to see the evolution of this model throughout the history of the libertarian movement and the profound transformations that have taken place from 1968 onwards.

The definition has precise characteristics: a coherent choice of means for reaching the aims of justice, equality and freedom; intervention in the quick of social struggles; refusal to prioritize the economic factor in the evolving of the exploited/exploiter conflict; the elevation of a liberatory culture to oppose the bourgeois culture of repression; optimism; faith in man and his innate gifts; an a priori refusal of doctrines; use of the empirical method "try and try again"; specific solicitations on the social conflict in act with means of every kind (insurrectional-violent or pacifist-educational).

This framework is not complete but it gives the rough contours of a perspective that cannot be brought about in practice. Offspring of social contradictions and the social struggle, anarchist militants are not only products of their time, they would be insignificant automata if they were to base their action on abstract principles without relating them to the requirements of their intervention in reality.

It should not be forgotten that one of the most important points of anarchism is precisely its ethical preoccupation, and this would disappear if one were to try to obliterate the contradictory vitality of the individual in favour of an idealism detached from history and its events. If the strong point of anarchism is its methodology, great freedom of action is possible within that framework. In fact, if one were to dictate the main rules of anarchism in Ten Commandments, throwing out anyone that failed to manifest the intention to follow them scrupulously down to the last detail, and there was an accentuation of internal norms and elaborate codes intended to confuse ideas or create conflict, one would end up with a minority of revolutionaries with very limited choices. This character model is marked by a net subordination of one's own happiness, interests and need for a private life to the aims of the organisation and the revolution. By making the model of reference rigid, people become rigid, personality falls into second place. The abstract ideals of justice, equality and freedom come to be considered important enough to justify self-oblivion, the nullification of any stimulus towards the different (which ends up being considered bourgeois, so is condemned).

Once they have conformed to the basic rigid model these comrades would no doubt be disposed to make any sacrifice imaginable for the ideal, even their own lives, but they would be throwing the cold veil of separation between themselves, the ideal (now "their ideal") and other comrades, i.e., they would come to deny the unitarian and collective process that the elaboration of the revolutionary model implies. Their aim would be to apply in the sphere of reality the model that they had crystallized in the sphere of analysis, without taking account of any possible individual or group differences. Phenomena such as the birth of a so-called "objective consciousness" would surface, leading to suspicion, intolerance, exclusivity.

We are looking at this extreme situation here simply to point out the dangers of a crystallisation of a model of anarchist intervention. In reality, such a model must, in our opinion, result from constant elaboration, verification and modification by all comrades, always within the basic methodological perspective, which is that of the correct choice of means for reaching the aims of justice, equality and freedom.

Specific historical transformation has produced different kinds of militants. There can be no doubt that the character of the French comrades engaged in the struggle against the reaction up until 1890 differed greatly from those of the anarcho-syndicalist comrades who later tried to address the struggle towards claiming better conditions, convinced that that was still within a revolutionary perspective. Just as there can be no doubt that profound differences existed between the Spanish comrades of the FAI and the Italian comrades of similar organisations. The same goes for the German comrades that went to work in America and those who stayed at home, for the English comrades in London and the Scottish ones, etc. The 'model' proposed by Ravachol is not the same as that proposed by Henry, nor is it the same as that which Bonnot was to propose. While basically remaining within the realm of illegality, profoundly different characteristics emerge, leading to differences in analyses and tendencies.

It is also possible to see differences at the level of language. The language of anarchist writings from 1880 to 1895 in France is different from that between 1895 and 1914. Galleani's style differs from Malatesta's but is very similar to that of Cipriani and Ciancabilla.

The variety and flourishing of models since 1968 is even greater.

The development of cultural analysis, the widening of revolutionary reading, the French phenomenon of May, a faster circulation of ideas, the breakdown in traditional university structures, the crisis of the most sacred values of the bourgeois world (science, projectuality, salubrity, integrity), have all produced rapid changes. Anyone that fails to adapt to the new era ends up being out of date and inefficient. The persistence of old schema, even by very valid comrades, is the sign of a difficulty in making the model pliable, but one goes ahead in any case and new lines of intervention are developed. Amidst contrasts and colossal blunders, amidst intuition and attempts at internal repression, a profound cultural modification of the world anarchist movement comes about. Hence the emergence of a new kind of militant that is still in formation, one that flees rhetoric like the plague and only focuses on a few points, but does so clearly.

The new anarchist militant places himself or herself in the libertarian tradition but at the same time they try with all their might to sift through the cultural contribution of the revolutionary left, as well as cultural models of the bourgeoisie. This has opened up many

contradictions from which deep theoretical splits have arisen, but these are very positive, breaking the circle of a cultural closure that had ended up with outdated analytical models. Basically, if one were to draw up a short inventory of the theoretical baggage of the anarchism of the 'fifties, especially in Italy, one would have to admit that some of the old models (revolutionary syndicalism, Malatestian critique, Gorian humanism, late-Bakuninist collectivism, Kropotkinian determinism) have become acritical rhetoric. Also models that are more directly influenced by action such as the ethical and strategic evaluation of armed struggle, have been influenced by this cultural atrophy. The actions of Sabate and Facerias were isolated acritically, often praised, often condemned, without the message they contain being able to emerge in the form of a concrete proposal to comrades beyond a mythisisation of armed action for the sake of it.

If we were to look at some of the examples that were fossilized by this cultural atrophying, we would have to point to the Sorel of the myth of the general strike (behind revolutionary syndicalism), the Malatesta of the final years (influenced by Gori's humanism), the Kropotkin of Ethics and Modern Science and Anarchy (as well as a little of Mutual Aid). That would imply a direct intervention in the reality that is trying to revive syndical models, now decidedly oriented in a reformist and authoritarian direction, a logic of waiting and naturalist and determinist ethical discourses.

Revolutionary culture's sudden break (also the authoritarian strain) with certain schema of the past (for example the sudden refusal of Crocian historicism and the immediate — acritical — acceptance of Marxism), produced considerable reflexes, also within the anarchist movement that was debating themes and facing problems that had previously been hidden under the ashes of badly digested rhetoric.

It is the ethical question that interests us here. Not that of text books but of the relationship with life, the question facing all militants that find themselves traumatically living the experience of being an anarchist in a society of exploiters and parvenus, exploited and acquiescent. And when anarchists refuse the bourgeois model at the same time as they refuse the authoritarian-collectivist model of the Marxists and Stalinists, they end up facing the problem of a socialised personality in a personalised society, a development of total self-management of the person in a society that does not crush man but exalts him and offers the possibility of living a coherent life.

So the project of a militant that does not hide difficulties from himself, does not have recourse to a huge apparatus of phrases and commonplaces, in fact is almost afraid to use slogans and uniform speech, forcing himself to work for the satisfaction of the global needs of society as well as that of individuals and groups. It is the problem of participation, of opening out and relating to others, refusing the party apparatus, refusing the bourgeois ideology of civic consciousness.

The debate has moved away from the clash between individual and organisation, the rights of the individual and those of the specific organisation (of the revolutionary syndicalist or simply revolutionary kind). It now concerns the autonomy of the militant's personality in a dimension of collective responsibility, within the process of the growth of social revolutionary consciousness that cannot be left to itself.

As the dominant ideology conformed to economic progress (between the 'fifties and 'sixties) an anticonformism that attempted to rethink some of the traditional models of political struggle appeared. Then, with the modifications in the very structure of power, the economic reflux and the entrance of the reformist forces of the Left into the dominant class, anticonformism becomes more responsible: quality of life opposes itself to the quantitative reduction in the class conflict. The stimulus of the individual, the ethical stimulus, is added to the material one with its partial analysis of a counterpower that had come to be conditioned by a certain culture of power (political science and its negation): politics starts living a new process of opening out.

This profound renewal is also part of a global crisis in the values of late capitalist society. It cannot be said with precision whether the fall of consumerist structures are a cause or effect of this crisis that has lead a great number of people to suspend their judgement and open up a kind of "parenthesis", a life that refuses what is offered by capital. In this world, which at the same time is out of this world, this "parenthesis" is no longer restricted to an elite but is a mass phenomenon that is too great to be ignored.

Today the anarchist is also conditioned by all this. It is all very well to say that anarchists are not "perfect", they are not "strange" beings from another planet, possessors of truth capable of finding the right answers and methods for intervening in any situation. Just as they are not the monsters of violence and terror that a certain press in the service of the bosses portrays them as. Nevertheless, they are not "revealers" of truth. And it is precisely for this reason that we can attempt, for the first time as far as we know, to outline the character of the anarchist militant of the past few years, at least within the limits of experiences in European countries where the movement has some significance today: Italy, France, Spain (Spanish emigration), Germany, England. If we were to consider anarchism a well-defined, crystallized doctrine, we would have to conclude that anarchists are born such and that anyone that "feels" for anarchy is either enrolled in some anarchist federation and shouts "Long live Bakunin", or reads no books at all and swears on the negativity of culture.

On the contrary, if we see anarchism as the theoretical and practical experience that emerges with a precise methodology in social struggles at certain times, we see anarchist militants as men and women of their time who are influenced by prevailing ideas — and the specific methods of anarchism — , and are involved in struggles against the class in power. The more the era is rich in contradictions, the more the crisis in the power structure becomes evident and the more the instruments that once belonged exclusively to the revolutionary forces come to be used by power for the repression. The more confusing reality becomes, the more anarchist methods become a relevant perspective. This is not absolute or taken for granted, we need to verify things so that the struggle against power can be organised correctly rather than resurge from the revolutionary cinders of the past.

So, anarchists are also people that live the contradictions of their time. Their character cannot escape the consequences. Their personality will end up hosting a crucial conflict between the ascetic aspect of the revolutionary: abnegation, agreement, and the ethical aspect of the individual that opens up to autonomy and the organisation of society in the egalitarian sense, seeing the limits and the need for progressive approximation. It is much

easier to intervene in reality and change it, however limited the action might be, than to intervene in reality, change it and in so doing, change oneself.

If more space is given to the first aspect of the conflict, we will have one kind of intervention in reality, that leading to the formation of a vanguard. In the second hypothesis we would see a growth in the anarchist movement directly, in the reality of the struggle, with the possible constitution of specific organisations that are expressions of this reality in struggles where it would be difficult for them to become vanguards.

This seems to us to be the most important problem that needs to be faced. It is a complex problem, as the passage from the dimension of the individual to the collective one is not just marked by the organisational forms but also by the aims that the organisation gives itself, those of the people that make it up, etc. If the tendency we have defined "ascetic" can lead to the formation of a vanguard due to a rationalisation of the conflict, the tendency which, with equal caution, we have defined "ethical" can make the same mistake due to an abstraction of the conflict as a result of the quantitative illusion.

The conflict between total and partial

We should say right away that in making a distinction between the "ascetic" tendency and the "ethical" one we are not implying that the moral aspect is absent from the former. This is a fundamental aspect of anarchist methodology (as we have said): the choice of means we use irremediably affects the ends we reach.

This said, it should be added that the problem of violence cannot be solved by discriminating between the two tendencies. A comparison such as "ascetic" = violence, "ethic" = nonviolence does not make sense. Always on the basis of the anarchist principle that refuses that "the end justifies the means", violence can legitimately be used for liberation without being seen as ambiguous moral relativism.

It goes without saying that in the clash with power, in the revolution, one is often forced to make choices between the greater or lesser evil. Debit and credit exists, even in ethics. But the contingent factors that explain some mistakes must never be raised to a moral justification of anarchist action.

Reality, with all its nuances, complications and contradictions, is reflected in the contradictory personality of man, and consequently also in the anarchist. So we can see that anarchist methodology is nourished and modified by analyses that use various instruments, from the intuition of individuals who decide to carry out a single action, to an organisation that acts upon the reality around it.

But the anarchist, employing his or her methodology with exactitude and recognising the contradictory aspects, causes modifications in reality that are both cause and the effect of the resulting contradictions.

All the same, it is not easy to see where reality ends and appearances begin in the conflict. It is not easy to separate men from their ideologies, and this can lead to an attempt to isolate certain levels of intervention by separating them from the ideological processes

that cover them. We often hear serenades to "doing" which, in the best hypothesis, are naive romanticism. "Doing" cannot be autonomous, i.e. it cannot justify itself alone.

To turn means into an end in themselves would correspond to the ascetic excess of the revolutionary, and if this is also quite a rational phenomenon (in the framework of the destructive process), as it cuts the conflict between total and partial in too net a fashion. It denies the latter, affirming the former, but camouflages both poles of the clash thus making the distinction problematical. This is the extreme case of an armed minority that have been radicalised by certain processes in the clash that are imputable to their strategy (on the one hand), but also and perhaps primarily to the decisions of power. Real motivations, specific tendencies between individuals and social groups are disregarded in favour of an acritical exaltation of the clash, the value of the armed "deed", attack and univocity of will. The militant is deformed by objective consequences and as this is happening he thinks that he is in charge of the situation. He becomes a professional, enclosing the outside world into the asphyxiating framework of the frontal clash, and from this perspective claims to judge the rest of reality. Once again ideological alienation (always present), reflects fundamental alienation. Then, in concrete, the requirements of the clash itself necessitates these operative reductions. It reenters the logic of the division of labour, one that it cannot escape as it is not possible to flee such a dimension in the absence of a decisively revolutionary and globalising act of rupture. That does not alter the fact that radicalisation exists and is logically founded, we were about to say "necessary", just as it does not alter the fact that this should be supported when there are cops and all their variety of accomplices on the other side of the barricade. But that cannot deny us the right to reflect and criticise. And the restrictive dimension, the dimension which in restriction wants totality, that is, that can (theoretically) aspire to totality precisely because it has reduced the world and all its deeds to a pocket dimension, should be criticised. The vanguard that comes out of this is as ambitious as ever. The greater the risks run to procure means, the easier it is for them to become an end in themselves. In this way the vanguard moves in the direction of becoming independent of its own aims, even to the point of replacing them.

One obstacle to revolution is the fact that in coming up against reality the vanguard, rather than consider itself a means, ends up preferring its own aims. These in no way conform to the general aims of the revolution, i.e. the definitive liberation of man.

We must distinguish between the model of the vanguard that we are looking at here and the classical one suggested by Marxism. For Marxists, the vanguard acts as mediator between the immediate and the historical interests of the working class. The paradox is that this vanguard must interpret the interests of the class whose conditions of development it must create. For the ascetic kind of revolutionary vanguard the problem of "mediation" does not exist, only that of "action". Only once the clash has evolved due to the reaction of power is it possible to speak of a real coagulation of vanguardist forms, with all the ensuing consequences (transformation into a military wing, professional deformation, etc.).

Yet, in our opinion, this is not the most delicate point of the conflict between totality and part. Far more radical is the underlying problem, the conflict within the militant as an individual.

The clash between totality and part is consistently present for the militant engaged in the struggle and, in the long run, this marks his character profoundly. It deforms his vision of life to the point of, at times — in the face of great delusions — making him refuse to accept reality. We see the extent of the problem in the anguished cry of Cafiero or in the painful writings of Coeurderoy.

The revolution is a globalising concept of human involvement. It is totality. It does not allow joint ownership, cohabitation or compromise. The anarchist struggle is the supreme recognition of the principle of realisable totality whilst safeguarding the value of the individual, an addition of great complexity in that it refuses to see revolutionary means as ends in themselves. In this case totality becomes crystal clear, dazzling. Everything goes towards it, one's self, one's family, one's affections, one's habits, one's hopes.

But all that (which no matter how grand it might sound to the individual is still very small) soon burns out in the immense furnace of revolutionary totality. And so one wants to act quickly to speed up a process that takes its own time and goes at its own pace. We begin to feel it weighing on us as though we had to carry it upon our shoulders.

Then we are forced to stand before the inexorable tribunal of the part. To measure growth, estimate distances, consider relations, indicate perspectives. We start to pay more attention to the pace of events. We start to save ourselves, preparing for the long road ahead. We would like it to go on for ever, our revolution, but we realise that we cannot imprison totality within the limits of our desires, and we end up giving in to care and strategy. We note that we are not alone, that facing us and our project of liberation are the masses (who are not necessarily ready to free themselves) and power. In full evidence and revolutionary mystery, there before us stands a contradictory but constant relationship between totality and part, dream and reality, ideal and strategic project.

Some, enclosing totality inside a more restricted dimension, asceticise their intervention. They wrap themselves up in a microcosm that they recognise as such, which they intend to take to infinity, perfecting it, claiming that it is capable of reproducing all the conditions of revolutionary totality on a reduced scale. Through this reduction they are trying to propose a "model", give an example, a point of reference so that many other "little" totalities will be formed, all together capable of forming such a vast totality as to get close to the final one. In one way or another this decision leads to the vanguard closing in on itself. Through the activity of criminalisation, power will do the rest.

Others, fully accepting the concept of partiality, dispose themselves favourably to long periods of time, i.e. quantitative measurement. For these comrades, basic doing turns into basic thinking. The relationship with the mass becomes educational and moves into the particular, the specific. The link with the totality that was made on the basis of a more or less globalising analysis becomes purely theoretical. In this way the quantitative degeneration of the ethical tendency is born, just as in the preceding case there was a qualitative degeneration of the ascetic tendency. Although different (the first open, the second closed), these positions are both open to criticism.

Revolutionary alienation

"Revolutionary alienation" is the awareness of the contrast between totality and part. It is disgust for the latter united with the possibility of the former, leading to a form of extraneation that is experienced as extreme discomfort in the face of the transformation of the system.

In a way we are faced with a phenomenon similar to so-called "unhappy consciousness" resulting from an inadequate reaction to one's class situation. Only, while unhappy consciousness is above all a sense of discomfort before a class dislocation that one ends up feeling estranged to, revolutionary alienation is the final breaking point in the process. It is the awareness of not being able to realise totality, of losing something in an effort towards totality, which we feel is the only possible road to revolution.

We turn to a profound critique of the "human" significance of the revolutionary being because one feels oneself to be a "thing". This process of reification comes about in the clash between the persistence of partiality and the continual return of the need for totality.

This is not the "crisis" of the bourgeois who crumbles because of the saturation of a life-style that has deliberately been built for him with fabricated needs and stimuli studied in the laboratories of power. It is not the crisis of consumerist well-being, boredom and remote-controlled action, a constant repetition of programmed change.

It is not the suspension of involvement or judgement, a taking refuge in an aristocratic dimension of reflection, or the power of the intellect regulating the universe of one's thoughts and illuding oneself that one is regulating the world. It is not a cutting off from the things of reality in order to go in search of the perfect utopian society, through numbers, verses or the preferred Icaria.

It is not a "piloted" upheaval in a reality that is held suspended with the help of some vehicle or other (drugs or whatever), that can correspond to, or actually be, the effect of the mass product, following fashion or a scale of values that the system itself can no longer uphold.

It is not alienation in the Marxist sense of the term, the loss of something that belongs to us, in the first place the social product, because it is through the product of our work alone that we recognise ourselves as human beings. It is not, that is, the alienation of the worker that reacts in a certain way before the forced perspective that the system of production is offering him.

The alienation we are talking about here is a lack of something, (a process of generic alienation) but is also a lack of oneself, the self that identifies with revolutionary totality. It is precisely this perspective (totality) that provides an outlet from the general form of alienation without, moreover, managing to completely avoid the danger of alienation reemerging through the frustration of the need for revolutionary totality.

When the alienated worker recognises his alienation, he becomes conscious of it and overcomes it. In this way he enters the revolutionary perspective. This can fall upon him like a ton of bricks if he is not able to fulfil what the absence of primitive alienation forces upon him: complete liberation and the realisation of revolutionary totality. In this way, the very perspective of liberation risks turning into a further form of alienation, that of lack of totality.

This situation is far more serious for anarchist revolutionaries. Having neither the charisma of the leader or the organisation, they have nothing to hold on to. Assessment of their own work is of little help; with one simple reflection they can put it into second place in the perspective of revolutionary totality. If they try to see something wrong with their situation, thus convincing themselves that a small enclosed portion of reality is the microcosm that produces totality, they transform themselves into a vanguardist mechanism and reify alienation to the point of not being able see it any more, just as happened in the phase of primitive alienation before the awakening of consciousness. They thus reify their own alienation, accepting the solution of partiality (analyses and long periods of intervention).

The fact is that revolutionary alienation is not simply a relationship that is lacking in something (totality), it is also consciousness of this lack. In other words, it is not just the recognition that something is missing, it is also a recognition of not being able to do without what the latter.

Do all anarchists engaged in the revolutionary struggle reach this conclusion? There is no simple answer to that.

One thing that is certain is that if anarchism is the refusal of authority, it is also a critical reflection on the basic conditions of life and all the ensuing contradictions. In a sense, one of the characteristics of anarchists is that they go into these contradictions as it would be strange for authoritarian revolutionaries to gain consciousness of this alienation through the tight mesh of the party structure that they find themselves operating in. But if this alienation is a consequence of a critical examination of reality, it should not be considered something negative but rather a necessary step, a difficult stage that needs to be overcome. To sum up, it is not the antechamber of revolutionary engagement, but is the result of it, the consequence of it. It is not even the ultimate solution, the final wall from which to recede and commit suicide, but the passage to a further phase of the deepening of one's knowledge and gaining maturity.

Before going any further it is necessary to look at the conditions of this particular kind of alienation.

The process starts from the absolute value given to the individual. Any proposal to sacrifice the latter to revolutionary strategy, or even to revolutionary totality, is rejected. The engagement can be total, can go as far as complete dedication and death, but can never reach the annulling of the individual. Anarchists who die for the revolution do not reject the value of the individual, on the contrary they take the latter to the maximum degree, as the sacrifice that leads to a society where sacrifice will be impossible, a freed society. In all their opening towards the struggle, in all the collective action that they feel and make their own, they never lose the individual dimension.

Alienation comes to them when they realise that only by accepting a worse form of alienation (the primitive kind or that of centralised power) will they be able to escape the danger of seeing the project of the liberation of the individual disappear. In actual fact, the individual at least manages to partially realise himself under the conditions of primitive alienation, albeit in a deformed (alienated) way. But anarchists want the complete realisation of the individual and want this in the social perspective of total liberation. They find themselves in

a serious crisis that comes from the contrast between individual and totality. Entering a partial dimension would heal many aspects of this crisis but would reproduce another alienated form, the vanguard.

Alienation only becomes a crucial factor when one is aware that one is alienated. And this is an effect of the individual's will, of moving in a situation of stalemate with no way forward leading to a consideration of the other possibility, the conscious refusal of totality as the immediate aim. The greater this awareness, the more the individual will open up to other possibilities.

But simple awareness, recognising that one is in a state of "crisis" could push the individual to sacrifice everything in order to come through the latter in the shortest possible time. Intolerance of a situation of uncertainty can push someone that is accustomed to radicalising their action to extreme solutions. If totality leads to "crisis", if it is this aim that spoils the revolutionary project by upsetting the destructive order that one imagined was deterministically progressive, we must cut off this pole of contrast. In order to do so it becomes necessary to undervalue it, accuse it of being utopian, a fantasy, unfounded, deforming, petit bourgeois. The ultimate accusation is precisely this last one. Anything that annoys us becomes a product of bourgeois ideology and its shop-keeping accountancy. A product of commodities and their reification.

However, by acting in this way one realises that one is losing a lot. For a time one is convinced that one has solved the problem, then it reappears. The perspective of revolutionary totality is what contained the quality of the revolution, its liberatory essence. Quality is the only thing that can give us the feeling of the totality of liberation at any moment when we are acting progressively. Only quality can make us live the final moment that we will never see, but which we must nevertheless feel present, like a reflex that allows us to know where we are. And this quality is often fantastic, utopian. It is very difficult for it to relate with quantification. By struggling for revolutionary totality we grasp the quality of the revolution and relive it in our actions, in the small things that begin to acquire a progressive sense of liberation. But all that also brings us alienation, discomfort, suffering.

When we suffer, we remember the things of the past with a sense of loss. This could be seen as nostalgia for primitive alienation. The world of reification can be a nice little port in the storm and, with this going backwards the suffering goes full circle. In horror we realise that alienation consists of not wanting to be something one could be but is in itself meaningless, and not being able to be something one would like to be, that means everything.

Make no mistake, we are not looking for a detailed revision of individualism, personalism or voluntaristic rationalism here. Certainly what we know of the vicissitudes of the person (the transformation of the mask) is not worth mentioning and is the fruit of bourgeois irrationalism (existentialism, phenomenology, etc.). Much more would be necessary, and it is not possible to go into that here. It is important to understand that we are concerned with the relationship individual/collectivity. Painful contradictions emerge in anarchist militants not because they are individuals, but because they are individuals who recognise their own value and that of the mass as two values that are in opposition to each other but which cannot be substituted the one for the other.

If revolutionary tension comes from the fact that the revolution is a totalizing project, a project that revokes the quality of life and claims to transform the latter completely, particular contradictions arise from the need for the individual anarchist to establish a correct relationship with the mass in order to avoid carrying out one single aspect of their decision alone.

The revolutionary encompasses the totality of the life of the individual. Hence the possibility of the realisation of the totality of the revolution (therefore also the totality of life) that is reflected in quality. But revolutionary decision is not something abstract. It is not a "possibility" or a "necessity" according to the perspective of whoever brings it about. It is real, it leads to profound changes in the individual and in this sense is "necessary". But in order to be such it must go beyond "possibility", i.e. must be realised. If the latter is not realised, even through constant engagement, it will never become a necessity. Herein lies the drama: it is the struggle that leads to going from approximation to this necessary aspect of revolutionary decision, leading to all the alienating consequences.

But possibility and necessity do not go hand in hand. Possibility draws in personal involvement and can even reach necessity, but only as a move towards something, as the singling out of an objective. Necessity as such, as the conscious place of the profound modification of the quality of life, comes from the mass, from what the mass produce. In a word, necessity comes from the masses' self-organisation.

One can wrap oneself up in the plots of revolutionary possibility to infinity. One can dream of insurrectional clashes or fantasize about long-term educational projects to the point of exhaustion, even to the point of insufferance and annoyance. Not for this does one reach the dimension where possibility becomes necessity, i.e. the recognition of the need for this resolution, the acceptance of the only valid road, that of going towards the self-organisation of the mass.

When we catch a glimpse of this perspective, the myriad of possibilities, the very possibility of a probable solution of an approaching totality, become unbearable for us. Time is required to realise this possibility, and that is what we lack. We want to run. We want the totality we caught a glimpse of to materialise. We want the waiting to become reality. This situation has no outlet in the current aspect of suffering. It is an intimate laceration, a contradiction that — when you think about it — is the reflex of the class factor, with even greater awareness, more suffering. And, because the process of awareness is one-way, the suffering of class laceration cannot be eliminated.

Let us examine the other form of alienation for a moment, the better-known one. This is an objective fact, i.e. the result of being deprived of something (the social product of one's work). With the awakening of consciousness (increased awareness) one also gains an awareness of alienation. The mechanism for correcting the situation of suffering, so-called class consciousness, would not make sense or would be a mere objective fact, if it did not include the possibilities that this creates. Religious residuals act at this level, pushing this class consciousness towards the search for mediated solutions such as looking for a guide. That obviously cannot be seen as a correction of the situation of suffering, but merely its "repression".

Other difficulties arise at different level of awareness. The refusal of the guide in some way corresponds to the refusal of the father. The self-organisation of the struggle necessitates the a priori refusal to discharge the responsibility of struggles on to someone or something. It is always the level of awareness that is growing.

The development of this awareness in the individual leads to what we have called revolutionary alienation under the conditions examined above. The developing of the self-organisation of struggles determines a transient feeling of discomfort, suffering, despondency in the mass that can be compared to that of revolutionary alienation at a different level.

But, whereas from the point of view of the individual there is only one sequence of possibilities and an unnerving need for revolutionary totality, from the point of view of the self-organising mass there is a progressive identification with a need that is becoming clear. In this case suffering and discomfort is the discovery of something that exists, no matter how small, not something that will become, because anything that is projected into the future (starting from the necessity of the present) is merely quantitative growth.

So the suffering of the individual comes from lack of quality (revolutionary totality), a lack that offers an infinite series of possibilities that project themselves on to the need for the self-organisation of the mass. On the other hand, the mass are experiencing a stirring-up, discomfort, real suffering, because they are beginning to discover the fact of self-organisation.

This dual situation of discomfort characterises the "human" field of the revolutionary clash and supplies us with the key for solving the problem of the vanguard. Before facing this final question it is necessary to clarify the structural relationship that exists between individual, minority and mass and examine the tension that emerges from it.

Revolutionary tension

Individual activity cannot be seen as something autonomous starting from which reality becomes thinkable through its organisation of the struggle. There is no such thing as a homogeneity of intent. In observing the attitudes and activities of the single individual one cannot reconstruct reality simply with an adjunctive action. The contradictoriness of the latter is far more complex than that of the individual and, moreover, is sustained by different structures. While the individual, through awareness of oneself, can reach revolutionary possibility and the need for revolutionary totality (hence alienation and its overcoming in revolutionary tension); the second, through self-organisation, reaches revolutionary necessity directly, so the growth of a first nucleus, no matter how small, is already the revolutionary totality at disposition.

We are faced with tendencies going in two different directions that might never meet, at least in the sense of eliminating differences and creating liberated reality beyond the reality of the struggles. In fact the other encounter, that of the guide and the party with the minority in the lead as memory and revolutionary reservoir of the mass, is not a real encounter but the denial of the very concept of encounter from the revolutionary point of view.

In fact, revolutionary totality, the new society, is not deterministically certain. Perhaps obscurantists will always manage to prevail and force the revolutionary project back, destroying progress and reestablishing barbarity. This note of precarity and instability is also to be found in revolutionary tension, rendering necessary a continual effort of assessment, verification, precision.

The presence and development of self-organised forms of struggle are not sufficient to guarantee the final resolution of theory in praxis, their unification in the liberated society. It is only a question of a tendency, including in this concept the profound sense of suffering derived from the gestation of new forms of struggle. All this produces a state of tension, of restlessness, in the movement of the exploited. New forces arise, new needs emerge, ideals and idols of the past are destroyed.

The tension of the movement of the exploited arises from the awareness of the discrepancy between one's being theory, and one's realisation in practice. This contradiction affects the movement deeply, often unleashing one part of it against the other, thus playing the game of the forces of power. But this tension is vital, it is the essential strength of coordination towards the future. It is from within it that the destructive and creative capacities of the revolution explode.

The anarchist minority also carry a profound laceration. The rigidity of the closed model seen as the reproduction of revolutionary totality risks depriving it of the quality of the revolution, that is of the new quality of life. Only by accepting this renunciation and falling victim to the quantitative illusion will it succeed in silencing the intimate tension that plagues it. But in so doing it also destroys the meaning of its own revolutionary anarchist project, cutting off any real contact with the masses. Not only that, its militants, as individuals conscious of revolutionary possibility in that they are (knowingly) cut out of the revolutionary totality, are personally living another tension that is felt all the more because it touches the life of each one. This other tension cannot be satisfied with quantitative games, globalising analyses or memories of the proletariat. It needs to identify itself in another, still wider, tension, that of the mass itself. Either the minority accepts living the tension of the single individuals that compose it while at the same time living the tension of the mass, or it is condemned to remain a vanguard and, as such, to become responsible for all the consequences that ensue.

Consciousness of revolutionary tension is the first sign of going beyond alienation.

For the movement of the exploited this consciousness expresses itself in a more organic search for the self-organisation of struggles. What was once lost in the individual behaviour of atomised defence against repression and exploitation, an individual reaction in order to reevaluate the life extinguished by the integrative process of capitalism, now becomes a quantifying project. The movement of the exploited begins to give itself an autonomous structure, it starts seeking new internal relations and links. In this research and realisation tension becomes construction. Theory increasingly takes form and begins to resemble practice more and more.

For the anarchist minority, the awareness of revolutionary tension is a sign of maturity. It gradually rids itself of the quantitative illusion, of feeling itself to be carrier of "truth", an "external" force, a "memory". This is only possible on condition that the internal tension be

lightened, that the single militants see the revolutionary relationship possibility-totality, have been struggling against alienation and been able to go beyond it in a personal tension. The latter now reappears at the level of a minority, to find its place within the wider tension of the movement of the exploited, the only dimension in which it is possible to find a constructive road towards quantitative growth.

The solution of the problem of the vanguard

To conclude, we can define the vanguard as an involution, a giving in in the face of the revolutionary anarchist project. Now we can see that the definition "an organic whole composed of individuals" that we made at the beginning is no longer sufficient. The actual composition of the vanguard becomes less important in the face of its significance within the complex framework of revolutionary relations. The vanguard is therefore an escape from the sensations of suffering and panic that are caused by revolutionary alienation; it is the refusal of tension towards the movement of the exploited, a tension that the latter develops in its contradictory relationship between self-organisation and delegation of the struggle. The vanguard takes the place of the quantitative task of the movement of the exploited, wanting to reproduce at a reduced level (either with edifying aims or with the aim of domination), the reality of the struggles as a whole. It is a desire to quantify the unquantifiable. It is a violent deformation of revolutionary possibility into fictitious necessity (totality). The vanguard is the acceptance of a globalising analysis that claims to "take account of everything" in an exclusively theoretical field, fictitiously doing what the movement of the exploited bring about in reality by becoming theory and praxis at the same time.

On the contrary, full knowledge of revolutionary alienation allows access to individual revolutionary tension, which would lose itself in a postponement to the infinity of the total project of the revolution, were it not to find its correct development within the tension of the minority. If this gives up in the face of obstacles, it transforms itself into a vanguard and acts accordingly. The tension of the minority extinguishes itself in the quantitative illusion and in the analytical project that claims to be global. The tension of the individual recedes into the suffering of alienation, finding comfort in a thousand little facets of the quantitative project cut off from the mass. In fact, the more pressing the suffering caused by revolutionary alienation; the greater the detachment, loss of totality and the quality of revolution, the more paltry the engagement in quantitative daily praxis will be in solving a guilty conscience. If the tension of the minority is inserted within the wider tension of the movement of the exploited a point of contact is made between self-organisation and delegation of struggles. It develops a solicitation for self-organisation, adding one's own revolutionary tension to that of the movement of the exploited, developing the anarchist revolutionary project fully in harmony with this movement's theory.

The more detail and clarification this theory acquires; the more it becomes conscious of itself, advances in the self-organisation of the struggle, gives itself an autonomous structure, connects internal relations and establishes links, the more it will renounce the false perspective of the delegate (parties and unions). The traditional function of the anarchist

minority will diminish, and, losing its value, its revolutionary tension will increase. In fact, the aim of the anarchist movement is to contribute to the construction of a society in which there will no longer be exploitation. And exploitation no longer existing, there will no longer be a need for the political struggle, movements and consequently not even the anarchist movement.

The final negation of the anarchist minority as such will not be the decision of a group or something that happens outside the minority. It will be the realisation of revolutionary tension in revolutionary totality, the liberated society. In this final phase, the movement of the exploited will realise its own theory (that will no longer differ from its practice), and through this realisation the vicissitudes of the anarchist minority will come to an end.

find each other.