

Elephant Archives

Towards the generalisation of armed struggle

Alfredo M. Bonanno

Alfredo M. Bonanno
Towards the generalisation of armed struggle

archive.elephanteditions.net

form which guarantees it not only as anarchist strategy, but also as a libertarian perspective.

When speaking of insurrection in the past, many comrades immediately brought out historical examples: the Matese gang, the Pontelungo conspiracy, and other such events, accusing us of “revolutionary romanticism” or of being “idealists”, or of being “objectively dangerous”. To us this all seems ridiculous.

Insurrection is the attempt made with revolution in sight. As anarchists, insurrection remains our privileged element, but this insurrection must be generalised, at least to the level of the widest possible practice of illegal behaviour. This is what is actually happening. What should we be feeling sorry about? Maybe we should complain about the fact that the contradictions of capital and the revolutionary claims of the exploited are preventing us from carrying on our sweet dreams?

Let us take heart. If hard times are ahead of us we know how we shall face them. It is precisely in these times that the sheep discard their wolves’ clothing. The time has come to put the chatter aside, and fight. Let us take courage and go ahead. And then, because as always the best form of defence is attack, let us begin by attacking first. There is no lack of objectives. May the bosses and their servants feel how hard it can become to carry on their jobs as exploiters.

From ‘Armed Struggle in Italy 1976–78’ Elephant Editions. Translated
by Jean Weir.

Insurrection

It is within the perspective of generalised mass armed struggle that the insurrection takes on a libertarian meaning, and marks the definitive critique of any 'closed' attempt to organise the management of the class conflict.

Generalised armed conflict is the natural outcome of a situation that is getting worse every day. The exploited are beginning to point out this necessity in a series of anti-institutional actions that are continually spreading. The isolated acts of punishment carried out by minority clandestine groups against some of those responsible for exploitation are coming to be accepted with satisfaction and approved by the mass. Attempts by the unions to organise protest strikes against such actions have had, at the FIAT for example, a very small number of participants.

There is no doubt that today the movement of the exploited, in its various forms and all its contradictions, is capable of attacking capital and the State structures that defend it. There is no doubt that this attack is actually happening. The only thing that seems strange to us is that at this point in the struggle, steps backward are being taken, shown in the persistence in using instruments (such as the armed party) that although they may have been effective in some way yesterday, are now anachronistic and threaten to become inward looking.

As anarchist revolutionaries we know very well that in this phase of class confrontation clandestine forms of resistance are still necessary. We know just as well that at the same time this presents negative aspects, that is, they risk becoming authoritarian.

It is our task to be careful so as to stop this involution, to fight so that the confrontation becomes generalised in its insurrectional

Contents

The level of conflict	4
Heightening the level of conflict	4
The problem of strategy	7
Insurrection	10

The level of conflict

This can be defined as the whole of the conditions that characterise the class conflict. It is very important to know these conditions, because one is often carried, for different reasons, to consider some more important than others, with the obvious conclusion that those who do not accept the same ones come to be defined counter-revolutionary.

It is not possible to fix a scale of merit concerning the conditions that determine the level of the struggle. It would in fact be out of place to overestimate economic conditions, underestimating, for example, ideological conditions which, precisely because they are breaking down, produce certain consequences and not others.

Heightening the level of conflict

Every historical moment has its own level of conflict. In a certain sense, history is history in that it manages to trace these levels and give accounts of the conditions which caused them.

Changes in the level of conflict are normal events which often come in “waves” which move around an axis which seems to remain stable even during continual change. This something is the ideological structure of power or, if we prefer, ideological structure itself, in that revolution does not have an ideological structure until it takes the concrete form of counter-revolution.

To move the conflict to the fictitious level of ideology often means to lose the concrete ground of the struggle, the only ground on which any theoretical consideration is valid.

There being no doubt that revolutionaries have every interest in raising the level of consciousness, it remains equally beyond doubt that there can be no interest in reaching ideological perfec-

We felt that this road could—which has in fact happened—take another direction, that of mass armed struggle, of generalised illegal behaviour which could deny and finally eliminate the very conditions of the initial clandestine struggle based on the closed military party. To put ourselves against this behaviour from the very beginning, as so many have done, would have contributed to the State repression against them, and would have prevented any development in a libertarian direction, something we considered possible from the start. By this we do not mean a libertarian development in the closed military parties, but the development of armed struggle in general and of all the comrades who work in this direction.

Disillusionment is pushing many people to a practice of generalised illegal behaviour. This behaviour materialises either at the workplace, or in the field of unemployment and criminalisation. This phenomenon goes far beyond the strategic perspectives of any closed military party, no matter how big and effective it might be. The Red Brigades, the NAP, Prima Linea, and many other organisations, have nothing left to say apart from their own self criticism. Either they integrate their actions within the plan of generalised armed conflict, which is happening slowly, or they will be destined to extinction.

Our task is also this. Just as we contributed to checking stupid and malevolent criticism and to avoiding the global repressive tactic hoped for by the State, today, as anarchists we must continue to give our contribution to the clarification of this process of generalised armed conflict, singling out, criticising and attacking any attempt—no matter where it comes from—to impose strategic and political models which the daily practice of struggle have declared out of date.

anarchist analysis planted in the vague realms of ideology, that feels obliged to give judgment on matters which it not only sees as estranged from it, but also as hostile. To be anarchists it is not enough to say what is right concerning the struggle that is in the course of development. It is necessary to be within a concrete perspective to be available for the revolutionary confrontation, to have evaluated well what all that means for each one of us at a personal level, and at a global level for the whole of the anarchist movement.

We have often published the documents of the armed struggle organisations that are operating in our country. Sometimes, on these very pages, we have also traced the essential lines of a critique of the closed military party. But we have not, when these comrades were persecuted and chased away, claimed to measure the distance separating them from us. This is because the distance, without doubt present and significant, could only have been put down on paper, therefore resulted in a banal ideological question. This has led to some misunderstanding by other comrades concerning our position, fueling an artificial argument that would have had no reason to exist had these comrades considered it more expedient to engage themselves in first person in underlining these differences which they only identified at an ideological level.

Now however things have changed, and the time has come to raise our voices loud and strong, so that even the deaf can hear us and those who pretend to be deaf see themselves shown up in front of the serious comrades who really want to struggle for the liberation of all the exploited and for anarchy.

The reason we have given space to the phenomenon of armed struggle over the past few years and supported the need to defend these points, however contradictory and dangerous they might be, was because we felt the road undertaken was an important one.

tion sooner or later, as this would become functional only to the re-establishment of power. In the specific case of the ideology of violence that is being discussed in Italy today, this becomes functional to the State, consenting the oscillations which allow the latter to become paternalistically open to discussion (see the Bologna meeting surrounded by six thousand policemen) one minute, then rigidly adopting strong means such as special prisons, police intimidation, special laws and tribunals the next.

It is not discussions about violence that raise the level of conflict, nor the debate on which type of violence is acceptable and which should be refused that pushes the exploited towards their liberation. No one can teach anything to those who have been suffering every kind of repression for centuries, on this argument. The ideological curtain falls, and the stage remains in its stark reality, that of the class struggle, with on the one hand the exploited and on the other the servants of the exploiters walking to their bosses' heels.

When we speak of the need for violence we are certainly not doing it to convince the exploited. They know this very well themselves, and put it into effect any time they have a chance to do so, with all the means at their disposition. We speak of the need for violence in order to point to the enemy with greater clarity, an enemy that tries to conceal itself in the guise of even brother or comrade.

The discussion on violence is also an element of great importance in order to recognise all those who, at the time of words, were so clever at splitting hairs, proposing models of the "right kind of violence" to the masses, based on their ideological judgments. When the level of the conflict heightens for all the reasons we have mentioned, all such discourses become both useless and determining. They are useless because the real confrontation renders them out of date and senseless; determining because they

sweep away the last of the illusions and denounce barren attempts to recuperate.

As anarchists we are for the social revolution, that is we are for the immediate and definitive overthrow of the State. We are for revolutionary logic, which is above all a destructive logic.

We are for the destruction of the State, which means we are for the physical (not verbal) destruction of the institutions and people who represent and bring about the State. We are against the police, the judges, the bureaucrats, the trade union leaders, and the bosses. Not only are we against police control, bourgeois justice, techno-bureaucracy, trade unionism and capitalism; we are concretely against the people who bring about these ideological forms in everyday life, turning them into instruments of repression. And this being against must translate itself into precise actions of attack. If we are against the police, we must not let ourselves be drawn into the ideological trap of those who, in the name of a misunderstood pluralism or a retrograde enlightenment, give space and feasibility to the enemy, affirming that everyone has the right to express him or herself, therefore also the police – who when they do express themselves do so with batons. If we are against all judges and bureaucrats, all bosses and the trade unions in their service, we must not wait for someone to tell us: “this boss committed a particular wrong or this trade union leader is guilty of such and such, this judge is particularly reactionary”. No! All of them, without ideological distinction, all the police, all magistrates, all bureaucrats and all the trades union leaders, all the bosses and all those in their service are guilty and should be attacked with any possible means, at any moment, at whatever the cost.

The moral justification is to be found in the fact of exploitation itself. Anyone who has been subjected to centuries of the monstrous pressure of work, anyone who has participated in building

the world knowing that he or she would never be able to enjoy any of it, does not need to wait for a particular sign of wickedness from the other side. He or she is authorised to attack, to strike, and to kill, just as the bosses and their servants attack, strike and kill at any time they like.

The problem of strategy

The fact that it is possible to discuss the methods and the best forms in which to conduct this attack, is a problem that has nothing to do with the moral foundation that justifies the attack itself.

Any such discussion must therefore become a discussion on strategy, on the evaluation of means and the achieving of ends. It cannot be said for example that “anarchists do not do certain things because...”. This argument does not make sense. What anarchists do as such must be evaluated in reality, not in the abstraction of theory, otherwise anarchism would not make sense, and become a mystifying ideology like any other.

Certainly strategic choices are not separate from the fundamental anarchist analysis, which when it is placed in reality becomes an indispensable part of revolutionary intervention. But if this same analysis were to be cut off from the reality of the struggle and become the product of some illuminated mind and transformed into a militants’ catechism, it would simply enter the field of ideology and become functional to the power it was pretending to attack.

That is why, when anarchists criticise and attack the claimed revolutionary role of the armed military parties such as the Red Brigades, the NAP or other more recent formations, they do it starting from an anarchist analysis, but one which bears in mind the real conditions of the class conflict today in Italy. It is not an