

Revolutionary Solidarity

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For anyone who has refused to take sides with any one of the ethnocracies involved in the conflict (and this is obviously not the case of the authoritarian groups “against” the war) a widening of the objectives against which to address their actions cannot fail to be an important step forward.

Massimo Passamani

Introduction

The concept of solidarity is not only used and abused by the various reformist syndicalist and humanitarian movements and even power itself, it is also sadly emptied of any content by many anarchists. The levelling is such as to reveal a symbolic attitude worthy of the Church but which allows us to put our conscience at rest.

Counter-information and propaganda in the lead, demonstrations (true processions), then nothing, provoke a feeling of powerlessness, a pernicious frustration that sees justification open the way to resignation.

We discover that everything crumbles there where the mentality of the group and quantity thought it was strong. Nothing changes as we enter a vicious circle with mournful calls to a miserable bartering with the State one wanted to fight.

When individuals find themselves alone at night, no longer supported by “collective strength”, the arms of Morpheus transform the imprisoned comrades one wanted to support, to whom one wanted to express one’s solidarity, into a real nightmare with no escape.

So! Should we no longer show solidarity to imprisoned comrades given that it serves no end?

Never! A movement that is not capable of looking after its comrades in prison is destined to die, and that at a high price under atrocious torture.

The reflection must be made in other terms. What does it mean to express revolutionary solidarity? Basically the reply is not all that difficult.

Solidarity lies in action. Action that sinks its roots in one’s own project that is carried on coherently and proudly too, especially in times when it might be dangerous even to express one’s ideas publicly. A project that expresses solidarity with joy in the game of life that above all makes us free ourselves, destroys alienation, exploitation, mental poverty, opening up infinite spaces devoted to experimentation and the continual activity of one’s mind in a project aimed at realising itself in insurrection.

A project which is not specifically linked to the repression that has struck our comrades but which continues to evolve and make social tension grow, to the point of making it explode so strongly that the prison walls fall down by themselves.

A project which is a point of reference and stimulus for the imprisoned comrades, who in turn are point of reference for it. Revolutionary solidarity is

the secret that destroys all walls, expressing love and rage at the same time as one's own insurrection in the struggle against Capital and the State.

Daniela Carmignani

What we want to bring to light are the responsibilities of external governments and international political and military organisms.

What is happening in ex-Yugoslavia cannot therefore (and here we came to the second point) be carried out within a logic of aid. To limit proposals to the creation of structures for receiving refugees and deserters means to accept the logic of emergency which is no more than one of the many mechanisms which the war, when it is considered as a separate event, produces. Someone has pointed out how aid is, over and above the good intentions, a spectacular expression of statism. Is it by chance that the associations that carry it out are often directly related to the armed forces and that they tend to absolve external responsibilities (such as for example those of the UN)? Is it possible then for aid to contradict its very nature if it is organised by anarchists? Or would it continue to favour, instead of damaging, the structures that have every interest in fomenting the war? The idea of creating an aid network by getting in touch with local councils to no up areas of welcome for deserters put forward by some of those present is even further removed from autonomy from and conflictuality against power. It is obvious then, it was pointed out, how the ideology of emergency leads to allying oneself with the internal power structure (even in the form of local administration) in order to "resolve" an external situation that has in part been created by the latter – or at least in collaboration with it.

Instead of "aid" (third point) "complicity" was spoken of, by that meaning the will to develop, through collaboration with groups and individuals in ex-Yugoslavia (and other countries) that are active against the war, moments of action that are really anti-militarist. In this sense the practice of direct action against the military structures (and not just military ones) that exist in our own country was proposed.

In order to create these relations of complicity the circulation of ideas and information is essential (for example through meetings such as that held in Pordenone and other more informal ones) and the spreading of this material (for which the publication of a "bulletin" was suggested).

In such a context, the proposal (still to be verified) to concretely support the actions of deserters through a network between libertarian individuals and groups active in Italy and other countries takes on a different perspective. (fourth point)

A theoretical and methodological approach of this kind could, I believe, supply useful instruments for reflection and practice concerning a situation such as that of the Balkan peninsula, which there has been a time-lapse in understanding on the part of anarchists. In fact (and here we are facing the last question under discussion), the complex task of singling out responsibilities has not led to a "peace" movement such as the one that was created, for example, during the Gulf war.

Aid or Solidarity?

A few notes that survived from an antimilitarist meeting in Bologna

What follows is no more than a few points that all the anarchists present agreed upon at the end of the two days. Each one of them, although strongly linked to the others, deserves to be examined individually because of the profound theoretical and methodological problems it raises. The circulation of this text should therefore serve to stimulate further moments capable of bringing forth new ideas and, above all, new instruments for practical intervention.

The present writer is convinced that the foul war unleashed by the statist counter-position in ex-Yugoslavia is, in its complexity, a great acid test for anarchism in that it involves many of its theoretical assumptions, historical experiences and practical proposals (the problem of the national liberation struggle to give but one example). Perhaps the most important point of the discussion was the consideration that it is impossible to make a distinction between the state of war in ex-Yugoslavia and, more generally, the context of armed peace which it is taking place in. The importance of this lies in the fact that proposals for concrete intervention cannot fail to conform to this kind of analysis of the situation in the Balkan area. If one were to consider the war as a thing in itself the actions proposed to contrast it would tend to re-establish conditions of normality, therefore favour – even indirectly – the forces who want to restore Peace. Whereas if the bellicose event is inserted into the reality of dominion where (and only where) it belongs, it becomes possible to identify a much wider field of practical intervention and single out objectives linked to far wider responsibilities. The question is far less banal than it might seem. To say war is also that which States and economic structures put into act daily all over the world through oppression and exploitation does not deny that there is a difference between the situation in Italy for example and that in ex-Yugoslavia (in fact, dominion – within which however divisions cannot be traced – determines the cohabitation of the most refined instruments of technological control with the most cruel barbarity). Just as it does not mean one considers (as it seems some do) that a formation of opposing ethnic groups could materialise in Italy.

Revolutionary Solidarity

There are many ways to demonstrate solidarity to comrades who are being criminalised by the State, each one of which is a direct expression of the way one intervenes in the social clash in general.

There are those who see solidarity as lending a social service to this or that arrested comrade, and that is the way they carry out their activity: looking for lawyers, sending money and clothes to prison, visiting and so on. This purely humanitarian solidarity also translates itself into the constitution of defence committees and relative campaigns aimed at influencing public opinion.

Then there are those who see solidarity in a strictly political key and play at making a heap of “distinctions” aimed at not compromising the image of their own activity. So for reasons of opportunity they defend and show solidarity to those who declare themselves innocent, not to those who claim responsibility for their actions.

Others still, if they see there is something to be gained in terms of political propaganda, immediately bring out flyers and leaflets in formal solidarity with the comrade or comrades arrested, i.e. they declare solidarity in words, while in practice there is no trace of it.

Then there is solidarity in an ideological context. This is the case of the marxist-leninists in the revolutionary combatant party version. They show solidarity with those with positions similar to their own, and are in contrast with those who do not share or recognise their political line or strategy, often using censorship and ostracism against those they consider inconvenient.

What do we think we should mean by revolutionary solidarity then? The first aspect is that of seeing solidarity as the extension of the insurrectional social practice one is already carrying out within the class clash, i.e. as a direct demonstration of actions of attack against all the structures of power, large and small that are present in one's own territory. And that is because these should to all effects be considered responsible for everything that happens in social reality, including therefore the criminalisation and arrest of comrades wherever they are. It would be short-sighted to reduce the question of repression against comrades to something strictly linked to the legal and police apparatus. The criminalisation and arrest of comrades should be seen in the context of the social struggle as a whole, precisely because these are always the hasty material means used by the State to discourage radicalisation everywhere. No matter

how great or insignificant it might be, every act of repression belongs to the relations of the social struggle in course against the structures of dominion.

The second aspect is that each revolutionary comrade should be defended on principle, irrespective of the accusations made against them by the State's legal and police apparatus, in the first place because it is a question of snatching them from its clutches i.e. from the conditions of "hostage" they have been reduced to. Moreover, it is also a question of not losing the occasion to intensify the attack against the "law" intended as the regulating expression of all the relationships of power present in constituted society.

The third aspect concerns the refusal to accept the logic of defence that is inherent in constitutional law, such as for example the problem of the "innocence" or "guilt" of the comrades involved, and that is because we have many good reasons for defending them and no one can justify the political opportunism of not doing so. We cannot and must not consider ourselves lawyers, but revolutionary anarchists at war against constituted social order an all fronts. We aim at radically destroying the latter from top to bottom, we are not interested in judging it as it does us. For this reason we consider any sentence made by the State vultures against proletarians in revolt, and all the more so if they are comrades, to be a sentence against ourselves and as such to be avenged with all the means we consider opportune, according to our disposition and personal inclinations.

The fourth and final aspect concerns our attitude towards the arrested comrades, whom we continue to behave towards in the same way as those not in prison. That means that to revolutionary solidarity we always and in any case unite a radical critique. We can and do show solidarity with imprisoned comrades without for this espousing their ideas. Those who show solidarity to imprisoned comrades are not necessarily involved in their opinions and points of view, and the same thing goes for us as far as they are concerned. We actively support all imprisoned comrades in all and for all, but only up to the point where what we do for them does not come into contrast with or contradict our revolutionary insurrectionalist way of being. Ours is exclusively a relationship between social revolutionaries in revolt, not that of bartering positions. We do not sacrifice any part of ourselves, just as we do not expect others to do the same.

We think of solidarity as a way of being accomplices, of taking reciprocal pleasure and in no way consider it a duty, a sacrifice for the "good and sacred cause", because it is our own cause, i.e. ourselves.

Starting from these premises, of primary importance in the development of one's anarchist insurrectionalist action, revolutionary solidarity takes on meaning as such, because we would show simple material support to any friend who ends up in prison.

Alfredo M. Bonanno

one, which necessarily ends up in the realm of the morals of power produced and imposed by the bosses.

This brief reflection should help us to see various situations more clearly, in the first place that of Sacco and Vanzetti. If being innocent is no more than an external factor that might or might not exist — and in the case of the two comrades Sacco and Vanzetti murdered in America, they were innocent — comrades should be defended everywhere, even if they are “guilty”. Now, if this is so, we cannot constitute wide fronts when comrades are innocent, then limit ourselves to a small part of the anarchist movement when comrades are “guilty”. The thing should be approached in the same way, at least theoretically, if we admit in the first place, as should be obvious, that “innocent” or “guilty” only exist in the logic of power.

How can we get out of this dilemma? Quite simply. By always starting from the fact that for us the technical aspect is secondary, and if comrades are accused, imprisoned and in some cases even killed, this happens, apart from the objective event that constitutes the element of debate in court and which is of marginal interest to us, because they are anarchists. We cannot make technical points become the central elements of the defence campaign.

Many comrades, even those in good faith, think differently because they are prey to the banalities of the dominant ideas. The claim to objectivity is one of the cornerstones of the philosophy of the conquerors.

It is important to understand this because it always takes us by surprise, reappearing where we least expect it. That reality is something that can be determined in a precise way is one of the many myths at the basis of the new scientific thought, just as when it emerged from the complex conditions of the Renaissance, let's say, in the ideas of Galilei: rationalism reduced to description, no longer as essence.

And contemporary law is a worthy heir of enlightenment rationalism, not having changed the certainties concerning the “way” in which things went very much. One still assists today in comical “reconstructions” and other such things in court. We have become so used to this way of thinking that we do not even notice it.

When we say that Sacco and Vanzetti were not innocent but on the contrary were guilty, but only of being anarchists, we insert into the trial that claims to be objective (therefore of a quantitative nature), an element that is extraneous to the trial itself (or at least, is considered so by judicial science), an element of a qualitative nature.

And yet this is not so. Reality is precisely this complex thing that cannot be reduced to the result of a legal procedure. The latter will always be arbitrary and founded not on evidence but on strength, not on logic but power.

A difficult way of reasoning? Perhaps, yes, but if you do it once you never forget it.

Revolutionary solidarity is an integral part of our very being as insurrectional anarchists. It is in this dimension that it should be demonstrated incessantly, precisely because it contributes to widening what we are already doing.

Pierleone Porcu

The Virtue of Torment

Prison, a physical territory distinct and separate from the rest of social life and what it represents and determines, seems to occupy a reserved space in our thoughts and minds.

The law is a concentrate of the way society has chosen to regulate its conflicts (by force and through image), whereas prison sums up what directly crushes and oppresses us. For us it is a question of understanding how and where one can act to put an end to all the filth of survival, including facing the problem of the destruction of prison and the law. And in order to put an end to the law it is also essential to stop thinking and talking in its language, that normally used to denounce the “abuses” of power. By so doing we certainly don’t want to contest the prisoner’s possibility to demand to be treated properly when tormented by the screw. But by shutting oneself up in particular wrongs (the screw’s abuses) without considering the monstruousity of the very existence of prison, the prisoner finds himself drawn into a perverse accountancy: what does it mean to ask for the right to be treated properly? Would any individual whatsoever not prefer not to be treated at all?

The other side of the law

Law as the right of an individual to obtain or do such and such a thing, or as a whole including texts and legal practices. The latter apparently include and guarantee the former. So the democratic procedure always consists of padding out law with the rights of man, whereas any law we might benefit from is itself a dispossession, a search for ourselves in something other than ourselves.

But what do laws define? Freedom conceived of only in negative terms: “my freedom ends where another’s begins”. A vision of the individual as a territory limited by others, a vision of small proprietors, precursors of the famous “my body belongs to me”. It is not by chance that the temporal dimension, a fundamental human value, is lacking in these concepts.

Every right is by nature both a principle and a practical means of exclusion and privation. Whoever says right says exchange, because the law is there to organise a measured repartition of rights and duties and, in the case of damage, it prescribes the amount of compensation. A right always belongs to a miserable proprietor, because he needs a property title for something he is afraid

by an enemy who makes and breaks the rules of the game at its pleasure. For a “democrat” on the contrary there is a net difference between being guilty and being innocent. Guilty is he who has broken the law in a precise way, in the context notified to him and for which legal proceedings are commenced. On the contrary, the innocent are those who did not do what, for various reasons, they have been accused of. The great mass of those who still cringe in horror when they think of what happened to Sacco and Vanzetti, do so because these two comrades of ours were innocent, i.e. did not carry out the robbery or kill the people they were accused of killing and which they died for on the electric chair. A small minority, and among them there must have been anarchists, cringe in horror not only because of the ignominious, atrocious method in which the prosecution succeeded in maintaining their responsibility concerning the specific events, but because Sacco and Vanzetti were murdered by the State. Would the horror we are talking about have existed, apart from in this small minority which for one reason or another did not take any notice of the objective fact of their innocence, if the two anarchists had had a more dignified trial (from the point of view of establishing proof) and it had turned out that they had committed the robbery? We are sure that things would have been quite different.

The great mass of those who are respectable by profession would all have been in favour of a sentence, and we understand this. On the other hand a small minority including anarchists would, like Galleani, have stated that there is no difference between innocence and guilt.

Had Sacco and Vanzetti really been responsible for those deeds there would only have been a modest show of defence at the level of opinion by comrades, such as that which existed some time before the tragedy of Sacco and Vanzetti, for Ravachol for example. On the other hand, comrades who put themselves in the optic of expropriation cannot believe they have a movement behind them, no matter what its objective conditions are and the level of theoretical awareness within it.

Why can we not expect such a thing? For at least two good reasons: first, because the decision to carry out particular actions, including those aimed at participating through a precise effort in increasing the availability of certain revolutionary instruments, is always a personal decision and must be borne, in good as in evil, by the individual comrades and their matured awareness. Secondly, because a movement, even a revolutionary one, needs to develop, has divergences of opinion, certain legitimate reservations that cannot all be cast aside in one go.

Put this way, correctly as far as I can see, there is nothing strange about taking a distance in such cases, thus clearly showing one’s extraneousness to the question. Whyever should one let oneself get involved a posteriori in something one does not agree with? The only criticizable position is the moralist

principle due to their militancy, their belonging to a specific part of the American and international anarchist movement, would be cast into the background. That was the price of that collaboration. After all, one could play on the doubt, and this still happens today, that it was a question of two immigrants, two honest workers, and underline the nationalist and class element which certainly produced results at the time but did not put any light on the anarchist and revolutionary personalities of Sacco and Vanzetti.

Was the presence of the forces of the international “left” useful to the aim of saving their lives? One must conclude that they were not, given that the two comrades were assassinated all the same. The fact that it reduced any possibility of their anarchist activity emerging is also negative.

What would have happened if that presence had been refused? The two comrades would have been defended in the same way as the others who ended up on the scaffold, some innocent, some guilty, were by Galleani’s paper. And here we come to the question: but does this differentiation between “guilty” and “innocent” make any sense?

Frankly, I don’t know. I reread the “Acts” we are talking about here, and saw that both Sacco and Vanzetti contributed to *“Cronaca Sovversiva”*. So they must have been aware of Galleani’s position on this false problem. The fact that they were “innocent” could not make them go back to a total acceptance of the innocentist road, at least in the terms developed in the trial. I agree with Pedretti, therefore, when he writes “Bartolomeo Vanzetti was not an acritical one-dimensional person, he denounced the mechanism that led to heroising his defeat to the bitter end: he was essentially a communist anarchist, profoundly convinced and extremely proud of his political and existential choices... in fact he never concealed his hatred of the injustice he was a victim of and his desire to be avenged”. (p. 130) In a sense, once the decision had been made it was necessary to go on to the bitter end, right to the point of making the fact (imposed by the “frightened progressives” who made up the great mass of the supporters of Sacco and Vanzetti) that they were anarchists appear between the lines.

“Innocent” or “guilty”

The fact that Sacco and Vanzetti were murdered although obviously innocent proves only one thing: that the concept of innocence and guilt is not an objective fact but is a measure imposed by the class struggle. The legal techniques and police procedures that establish whether a person is guilty or innocent are part of the culture of power.

For an anarchist revolutionary the procedures that come to be pushed as logical “evidence” are worth absolutely nothing. It is to one’s revolutionary conscience that one must respond, not the evidence of a situation orchestrated

of losing or that could be taken from him. Law is always aimed at governing a community which is incapable of living as such, in order for it not explode completely.

Law is also an ideology — a mental and rational construction that serves to justify the real social function of justice.

Today law is a precise quantifying coded instrument which determines and points out what each individual, including each civil servant, must do. The police are held to respect very severe regulations and at the same time they are continually having to break them in order to function. Legal control of their work is a fake: everyone knows the pig uses particular techniques in order to function and to exert pressure, which judges nearly always close a eye to. No matter whether it is applied to the investigator or the common citizen, the law does not prevent excesses, it merely keeps them within reasonable limits so as not to put the social order and institutions at risk. In the same way a prison sentence serves to circumscribe the revenge of the injured party by keeping it within the limits that have been established and applied by a third party “above the parts”, as all societies dispose of norms to allow those in power to regulate their arguments, legitimize their power and obtain the consensus of the exploited.

The Bible does not define, it lists, justifying such an operation with the unknowable and inscrutable divine will concerning what one should and shouldn’t do. The modern era also supplies a definition of man upon which to organise its social rules. The same goes for the law, with the pretext of establishing what is right and what is wrong. Hence the classification into good and bad. Innocence and guilt are attributes of the legal mechanism as they contain a judgement (which the person concerned is heartily invited to interiorise). Now, to understand and live the crudest acts (rape, murder, torture) does not mean to judge them. Whoever sits in judgement is acting in the name of something that goes beyond the social relations which determined these same acts.

Precisely in the same way as morals do in interpersonal relations, the law applies a pre-established norm to a conflict or violence to solemnize the trauma, defining it in order to exorcise it. In this logic it is necessary for there to be a guilty party, not just someone responsible, as guilt penetrates the guilty, becoming their whole being. This is complete when the law claims to judge not only action but the whole person in the light of their action, reinforced with an analysis of the motivations, psychiatric reports and personality tests.

The sphere of State control is extending as rights increase, as it is necessary to have them respected and to sanction transgressions. The tendency of democratic society is to penalise everything. It has a clause and a punishment for every form of violence from the slap of the parent to rape. The extension of rights is synonymous with generalised criminalisation. It is claimed that violence has

been banished from all social relations. But that reinforces the monopoly of violence that has been “legitimised” by the State, which is infinitely worse than any other kind. The law does not eliminate violence, it normalises it. Like democracy, it constitutes a filter to intolerance and violence alike.

Like democracy, the law functions on the basis of reason without having recourse to force. But for this reason brute force is also necessary in order for it to express itself, for any discussion to take place on its own terms. In the same way democracy bases itself on the refusal of the violence it has generated and which it needs in order to perpetuate itself.

And so this filter also affects radical action, when it enters a court for example, rendering it incapable of proposing anything other than what is acceptable to the law. However, that is not a reason for not acting, or for regretting having acted, but rather for doing it knowingly: no revolutionary intervention can exist within the ambit of the law. The legal apparatus separates the accused from the discussions that concern him by delegating his power, as is continually done in democracy, to a few of its representatives: in this case to lawyers.

The worst thing is that, because the trial is public, one is convinced one is controlling the law, whereas it is really the law that is controlling the public. The image that comes from the court carries an essential, hypnotically repeated message: violence is the monopoly of the State. And when conflicts between parties lead to confusion and uncertainty it is the State that sorts things out: “I also have a monopoly of truth”. The trilogy “police-justice-media” must therefore be analysed as a whole. Even if the game between the three partners overthrows it is still able to absorb any scandal. There is a scandal when it transpires that somebody has broken the rules: but such an accusation presupposes one’s remaining inside the game. The real rupture would be to break out of it.

No denunciation, no blinding glare of truth contains on its own the strength to threaten the existence of social institutions and relations.

The social prison

So, why take up the question of repression and the law? Certainly not just because of the existence of the primary, essential, exemplary horror of the courts and prisons. We have no need to seek a peak of horror in order to put the whole of society in question, as that would fail to supply us with elements for getting to the roots of exploitation and alienation. Moreover, a scale of atrocities would be inconceivable. The prisoner in jail, the soldier being trained for fighting in the mud of a trench, the worker who has an accident at work, the peasant who toils sixteen hours a day, each one has a number of good reasons for finding the ultimate horror in their own condition.

But although we have read about and are aware of all this, we are still convinced that justice should work. Christ! How can you send two innocent men to death! The holy indignation of so many anarchist comrades goes hand in hand with the lay indignation of the communists, democrats and possibilists of every shade. The glorious crusade of the left reassembles unequivocally each time the names of Sacco and Vanzetti are mentioned. And what links them is precisely the general and objectively justifiable question of innocence. But the rage that is at the root of this, the rage for two comrades murdered by the State, cannot let us close our eyes to other problems.

An inopportune presence

It seems to me that the flux of democratic personalities, the artistic and literary ones even more than the judicial or academic ones, greatly contributed to spreading the Sacco and Vanzetti “case”. This led to vast propaganda at world level, but also to lowering the level of the clash that was undoubtedly taking place in America, and more specifically in court, at the time. Too much talk, too many theatricals, too many democratic journalists, too many politicians. And this, like a continuous, perverse thread still is going on today with attempts to recuperate by the contender to the White House, Dukakis.

But how do you decide otherwise? Take the case of piazza Fontana [1969 – a bomb in the Banca dell’Agricoltura, Milan, kills 17 people. Anarchists are accused of this State massacre which was denounced by the whole of the left] – could you have told the Communist Party to get lost and drop their support? If anarchists do everything to spread their propaganda in order to involve people and have themselves heard by the widest number possible, how can they refuse the collaboration of the political and intellectual forces even though they know perfectly well where that leads. This is not an easy problem to answer. At the time of Sacco and Vanzetti, could they have refused the support of people like Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O’Neill, Walter Lippman, John Dos Passos, not to mention the various Roman Rollands, Thomas Manns, Albert Einsteins etc., all over the world who supported the anarchists’ innocence? Yes, it would have been difficult.

But I don’t want to bring up the quite legitimate point of view that the comrades should only have been defended within the international anarchist movement, with propaganda limited to the latter’s motivations accepting only the outside forces that were willing to keep the question within these limits. I just want to say that the kind of collaboration imposed by the lawyer Moore necessarily had to have the stamp of approval of both the Defence Committee and the two comrades in prison. It wasn’t foreseen how much the innocence of the two comrades would be underlined and how neglected their guilt on

A few notes on Sacco and Vanzetti

Of course we are far from the times and conditions in which the tragedy of Sacco and Vanzetti took place. But have the problems concerning the way that the movement of democratic opinion all over the world reacted changed all that much? Why? Perhaps due to lack of clarity and certain misunderstandings? These are the questions that led to the notes that follow.

Why these notes?

I read “Acts on the study day on Sacco and Vanzetti” held in Villafrutto on September 4 and 5, 1987, and asked myself how much did the fact that these two comrades were innocent count at the time and still does today concerning this affair? If the two comrades had declared themselves responsible, or had just as incontrovertibly been considered responsible for the actions attributed to them would they still have been defended by the international anarchist movement? What would the reaction of the world movement of opinion that took over the whole affair have been in that case?

Of course, history isn’t built with “ifs”, I know that perfectly well. And it is not my intention to make a contribution to the “history” of Sacco and Vanzetti. I have a strong suspicion of all more or less professional historians, have more than a little suspicion of history itself, and obviously suspect all politicians old and new and their good faith in taking up historical “cases”.

On the other hand, I have no doubt about the fact that Sacco and Vanzetti were quite extraneous to the specific acts they were accused of. But this certainty is personal and quite foreign to facts that can be ascertained or obscured in the event of a trial and does not prevent me from asking myself, and I hope the few comrades that read me, a few disturbing questions.

To die innocent means more rage

Of course, it must be terrible to die innocent, and that is because the moral value of justice is rooted in each one of us. Not the sacrosanct justice of proletarian rebellion that upturns everything and settles accounts in a collective thrust of destruction but the technical, judicial, traditional one. The old justice with the blindfold eyes that we unmask to discover in horror are all rotten.

Revolutionary Solidarity

In effect a solid, efficient society knows how to cover up a relationship of oppression with the honey of partial satisfactions. Is the humanisation of work not one of Capital’s constant programmes? And then, in a “free” and democratic society it is not necessary to simply produce wealth, it is necessary above all to “find a job”. In prison too they now understand that no one should stay idle any longer: the prisoner will be conceded a job in order to “earn his time”, and will be allowed to move himself, “fill up his time”. The concept of the inflicted sentence alone is now historically and culturally out of date. So these same subjects who failed to fulfil and “ennoble” their existence when they were outside the walls, now find themselves with an occupation that offers considerable advantages to themselves and the State.

The penal institution is necessary to the class society, no matter how many or how few prisoners it holds. The idea of an eventual suppression of it is a pure illusion, just as the idea of an economy managed from the base is, the existence of firms where the wage earners could “self-manage” their own exploitation (a horror worthy of the most sanguinary dictatorships). Prison has an indispensable symbolic function. The reclusion of the few not only recalls the existence of the norm that has been violated, but also functions as a point of reference, a rough border of the limits not to be ventured beyond.

Today’s society is one of maximum impotence and generalised assistance. The whole of existence now requires intermediaries, so there is a proliferation of public services whose function is assured thanks to a network of induced needs. The State fills the void of existence with the instruments that it uses to control at the same time as it maintains structures like prison as places of social dumping. Of course, this function could be assured in other ways. A society that was capable of reforming itself would do so with lower costs (social and accounting), but it would still maintain that function in some way.

Superficial critiques that are incapable of conceiving of an end to the law consider that it can and must be maintained, at best without intervening, imagining a future society without violence and attributing the violence of today to the misdeeds of the class society. This has been the dream of many enlightened partisans of all the schools of thought desirous of a “perfect” world.

A separate mechanism for the resolution of conflict by projecting an image and excluding the individual, the law will never be abolished even though its functions may be entrusted to another entity that is not above people and is far more maleable, revocable, submitted to elections, or controlled by popular assembly. A spontaneous form of justice with flexible laws or even without any text at all would not for that cease to be machinery dividing good from evil independently of and against social relations. It makes no difference to us whether judges be bureaucrats or not, the penal code rigid or adaptable. It is

the very notion of law that we want to destroy. Even if the law changes daily with the “evolution of customs” it does not change its function.

No matter what the opinion polls say, the social order wins every time one votes, in the same way that no matter what the jury vote, the very existence of the law is what constitutes the victory, it does not need anything else.

Just good boys and girls?

The modern legal apparatus is extremely rational and scientific as it ostentates its superior “impartiality” through the application of procedures which weigh up the possibilities conceded to the accused and their defence almost to the milligram. It can even allow itself to be scrupulous to the individuals who are obliged to submit to it, controls them, despoils them completely, having acquired full power over their existence. Its very existence is a victory as it constrains everyone, including those like us who contest it, to play according to its rules.

Only the incorrigible political lefty zealot can consider a sentence or an acquittal to be a victory or defeat of justice. And it is no wonder that it is precisely those who refuse to criticise the law as such who do not understand or accept the nature of Democracy, Fascism, Antifascism, and so on. Just as they participate in elections or claim immigrants’ right to vote. They call for working class juries instead of “bourgeois judges”. Their perspective is not at all that of destroying justice as such, but of democratising it like everything else. However, one sees there, tragically or comically, the reproduction of the characteristics of justice and its prison corollary. This often takes place among the exploited themselves, which gives an idea of the extent of the problem.

At times some might feel obliged to pass over to the enemy camp and argue in legal terms, but that never constitutes a victory. And anyway it is always a task that is best left to the lawyer. For example, a public action capable of raising doubts, waving the scarecrow of a clamorous “legal” error and some good work by the lawyers during the debate can even force the judiciary to renounce coming down heavily on the accused, but that does not alter the fact that in any case the law has acted according to its own rules by obliging us to respect them. Moreover, an institution that is capable of admitting its mistakes is an institution that strengthens itself.

In the same way a court that acquits, like one that convicts, is still a court. It would be hard to imagine anywhere that the disinherited have less power than in a court. An exceptional case could arise from pressure exercised on the judiciary by a social movement, for example when a crowd gathers demanding an acquittal precisely in the same way as a police station can be besieged by hundreds of demonstrators demanding that those arrested be freed, but this

pressure is external. It is always elsewhere that the strength of the exploited can constitute itself.

All the same, eradicating the conviction that the only way to obtain benevolent treatment by the legal apparatus is to busy oneself from the inside to show up the social inoffensiveness of those caught up in it is often an arduous task

Yes, and in theory we are all convinced that the best way to solidarise with an act of revolt is to commit another. Many are capable of applauding and praising a successful action, and there is no lack of comrades ready to put this maxim into practice by reproposing it, thereby contributing to its generalisation. Any act of subversion goes far beyond its actual outcome, in good as in evil. On the contrary, regularly when things “go wrong” and the authors of the act of rebellion are singled out or arrested, it does not occur to anyone to act in turn. Solidarity no longer concretises in our action but in the reaction to the actions of others, in this case, those of the judges.

So we prefer to wait, listen to lawyers’ advice, the arrested comrades’ declarations, the completion of investigations. We wait to see how things are going as though what mattered before was our desires and our attempts to realise them, and now it is simply a question of getting our comrades “out”.

Not intending to act instrumentally, getting comrades out of prison is undoubtedly our primary aim. All the same, it is necessary to evaluate the means one intends to use and to be aware of their nature and limits.

Instead it turns out that it would seem more becoming to put the usual critiques of the law aside. Forget the bellicose declarations of war against society and limit oneself to being just, and consequently to having an innocent person acquitted, freeing a sick comrade, or considering what in other circumstances we would accept as gestures of revolt, as nothing but childish pranks. But is that really what we want? To appeal to the humanitarian sentiments of those we despise?

In the face of the law and the fear it arouses, it seems that we are incapable of doing anything other than recanting ourselves and what we say we desire.

Rebels and revolutionaries when we are free, once we are in the hands of the enemy we are only capable of showing the innocuousness of the actions we carried out.

Power puts subversives, anarchists, in prison because as such they are “socially dangerous”. Is painting them as inoffensive lambs all we can do to get them out?

Are we cynical? Are we making an apology for sacrifice? Nothing of all that. We are simply tormented by a question that is beginning to worry us – are we just good boys and girls?

Aldo Perego