Elephant Archives

Towards insurrection

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Well, I think I haven't spoken about insurrection, as always, that always happens to me, but I'll try to end this long chatter. Let's say the effort we have to make, in my opinion, especially here in the struggle that you are in the act of developing, bringing about, is to give a direct contribution, but not heavy, not with the anarchist flag, to the construction of groups that you yourselves have called if I remember well, struggle circles, which, if left to themselves, cannot move to an attack against your objective — it is a proposal in the discussion.

For example, we stayed two and a half years in a town in Sicily to fight against the US military base, in Comiso, and we developed a struggle during these years. I hadn't understood in this struggle, what could develop during this struggle. I stayed there two and a half years, trying to build affinity groups, base nuclei, we attacked the base, we took our share of blows, we went to hospital, each did their part, but I didn't understand something that she [indicating a comrade present in the room] understood: that our project contained the possibility of an insurrection.

Not a local, but generalised insurrection. Why not dream of a development like that? Why in this small town of Sicily could another struggle not have developed, then in another town, then in Italy, Europe and the whole world? A generalised insurrection, why not? Well, anarchists are the only people in the world who can dream an enormity like that, fit for the madhouse.

Towards insurrection, if that has any meaning for me it is this: start off from a specific struggle, after which we don't know what can happen. Usually we go to jail, usually. But you can't say 'no, a development like that is impossible', why not?

October 1, 2015 at Acrata, *anarchist library,* in Brussels

it is big or small, or is called anarchist or something else, it's still a party. In the second case, we are building a spontaneous organization.

Spontaneous, even with our interpretation, our presence, it is spontaneous, because we are trying to have anarchist ideas accepted by people without putting the stamp on it that this is something anarchist. This isn't something new that we are facing here. Bakunin used it 150 years ago. We must understand that we are not politicians, we don't talk a political language but at the same time, we are not just people walking heart in hand, no, we are people who also think. Enthusiasm is not enough, it is not enough to have all our availability and put ourselves in the forefront to confront all the risks, confront the cops, have fights.

No, that's not enough. I'm not interested in the comrade who does things like that and after is happy about it, arrives in prison, turns over in bed and falls sleep because he has done his job. No. In any case, in such a situation the job has yet to begin. I am interested in who thinks, seeks to use their ability to understand, uses their head. So they must have experience, which is acquired over time, obviously, but also in the streets, experience and a revolutionary culture. I have terrible experience of a lot of comrades saying to me, 'I don't give a shit about books, I'm not interested in books, all that reading is not for me, I'm only interested in action.'

I don't agree. You can't act if you haven't understood beforehand and to understand you have to make an effort. You must read books, you have to study, but, careful, the book you are studying can become an excuse for sleeping, for always staying with books in one's hands. But at a certain point you have to close the books and say 'Enough books!'. 'Enough books' doesn't mean 'no books'. Then the project. The revolutionary project is born through culture, knowledge, experience, ability, also the heart, also saying at some point, 'right, enough'. All of that is a whole, not easy to understand, not easy to cut into pieces and tell oneself, 'Well I did this little thing, my little bit, I'm pleased, I don't want to do anything else', no. The anarchist is a complete man, is a complete woman, cannot be defined in little pieces. For example I've had the experience of many comrades who can read and write and know anarchist history and all that, but don't know how to drive a car. But what does the question of knowing how to drive a car or a motorbike have to do with what I'm talking about. Listen, I think it does have something to do with it. And if anyone in this room doesn't know how to drive a car, it would be well for them to learn. It's the same thing as the military map we were talking about before.

Every time I start to talk I ask myself, 'And if I didn't want to say anything for example?'

The title of this debate is 'Towards insurrection'. I said to myself, what does this 'towards insurrection' mean? That is, towards insurrection can mean writing, or talking anyway, or indicating a direction, something moving towards insurrection. I don't know what it is that moves towards insurrection.

I know that's what I've lived, and what I've seen, events that might seem like an insurrection in act. I later realised that it wasn't an insurrection, it was a simple riot. Now we are talking about something that can push us towards a riot, something that happens just like that, all of a sudden, for a reason that one can't foresee, in the street, in the squares, with a hundred thousand people coming out into the streets, is that what we're talking about tonight?

I don't think so. For me, that's not an insurrection. A hundred thousand people coming out into the streets, destroying the town, smashing the shops, dancing their war dance on commodities, — because we are against commodities we anarchists – is that insurrection? No.

Insurrection, apart from the fact that I don't know what it is, but still, I can envisage something that can look like an insurrectional project, is a movement. A movement is essentially made up of projects, projects are made of specifications, something that looks at reality to try to foresee it, that is to say, to try to understand how this shit reality we have before us can develop. What we can we expect, what can our revolutionary task be to make this reality move towards insurrection.

This is where the word 'insurrection' starts to have meaning for me. But that doesn't mean that I'm in the condition to make the insurrection move, I am in the condition to move, to write, to realise a project.

A project is realised by women and men who are committed, who put their lives into it. This is not only made of chatter, words, as we are doing tonight. It is made of ideas.

When we talk about destruction, which is a horrible word, I'm afraid of destruction because I am for life, for happiness, for love, but at the same time I ask myself, how can we live in a reality like this, how can you be in love with someone in a reality that only produces shit and forces us to live in shit? It's not possible. So, that's why I'm for destruction.

I'm not for destruction tout court, I am for the destruction of this reality, to build a different society. Anyone can tell me, but you, how can you be sure that the society you're talking about would be better than the one you just defined as a shit society. I am not sure, my comrades. I am sure

that I don't like this society, and that all the projects which for forty years I have been developing in my head and also with my hands, with other comrades, to transform — careful, transform, not modify — are projects of destruction. And there will also be projects of destruction in a different, new society, different, even if that society is called anarchy, because anarchy is a project, it's a process of development, it is not something established because otherwise it would be a new form of repression, even if it is called anarchy. Because the anarchists who went to power were the worst repressors in history. It's useless to talk of anarchist revolution if we don't take into account that the anarchist revolution is a process, not an état établi. something established. This is what I want to talk about tonight, 'towards insurrection', I want to talk about a project.

So the project is made of means, knowledge, ideas, exchange of ideas between comrades, the capacity to understand the other and try not to choke them with their needs.

Because each of us needs to live, and we approach the comrade and start saying right away what we want, what we want to do and what we want them to do for us — we must give the other comrade space to grow and to make us grow, at the same time. This is what is called 'affinity'. This is what is called 'the search for affinity'. Because all the topics we will be talking about tonight, that we will be able to talk about, I hope, are based on the concept of affinity. I don't want to build a party, I don't even want to build a movement established according to certain rules, certain projects, certain programs even if it is the program of Malatesta, it's shit this program. Why is it shit? Because Malatesta was a great revolutionary. Because it's out of date, times have changed, the things we're saying tonight won't be valid in thirty years' time.

Because time is a terrible thing, we need to try to see the reality in which the words we are saying now exist. No program, no project established once and for all, affinity is something that needs to be sought. We are anarchist comrades, we know what an anarchist group is. It is made up of comrades who meet, more or less in a place, in a place that is more or less known, more or less big or small, more or less dirty or clean (I don't know, usually it's dirty). They meet, talk, look at each other, love each other, there is also hatred sometimes, misunderstanding. But to meet together in an anarchist group, can you call this a search for affinity? No. No, my comrades.

This is a well known quid pro quo, very widespread. Affinity is something else. It is a search that starts from the single individual who has to move to seek their comrades. Obviously, the anarchist group is – in

Because they think 'well, it's impossible to get two hundred and fifty thousand people to become anarchist.' And I agree, that's not possible.

But is that the only solution? To remain outside? Or start talking to people? And then we reach one of the essential points of our reasoning: just talk? Or try to pass organizational ideas that are characteristic of anarchism, which are obviously based on attack, on self-organization? Also that is not easy. Because our discourse, we talk to people, our discourse convinces people, people understand the disruption of such a project of power arriving in a neighbourhood, that can destroy neighbourhoods, that can transform the lives of one hundred thousand people, and so they dream of doing something. Each one of these two hundred thousand people has a mind. A mind, that's an entire organization.

Each has their own idea. Each one wants to do something different from the other. That's normal, man is made like that, we must marvel at this thing, even we who are in this room, what are we talking about? About something that is different in the head of each one, we see it in a different way, and it's good that this be so. How can it be achieved then that people can organize themselves in an anarchist way without becoming anarchists, without entering anarchist groups, without people even realizing they are accepting the anarchist concept? Because if I approach someone and say 'listen, we have to attack, that's an anarchist concept', the guy answers 'I'm not interested, I agree with you about the attack, but I'm not interested in knowing whether attack is an anarchist concept or not.' If I speak to someone about an attack based on conflictuality, on permanent conflictuality, I have to tell him everything about permanent conflictuality, I have to tell him that there are no deadlines, there are no moments when we can be pleased with what has been done and the struggle is over. There is a struggle that continues in time, without stopping.

'Permanent conflictuality, that's an anarchist concept' and the guy says to me, 'What does that mean, that means nothing to me that it's an anarchist concept, I like the idea, I want to do it.' What we are talking about here is not idle chatter, it's something important because we are arriving at a concept of an organization of people in an anarchist way without people realizing that they are in the process of organizing in an anarchist way. Because if we were building a political party, that is to say, if we are going to talk to people, to be understood we would need to use a symbolic language, use very striking leaflets, symbols; or else you have to use ideas. In the first case, we are building a party, it doesn't matter if

mustn't put management into the hands of forty thousand communists, we are one million two hundred thousand.' So then we go into the government, we go to war. Traditional war with an army. It was anarchists who did these things, they weren't sent from planet Mars, it was anarchists. But it's not them, poor guys, it's quantity. Quantity is a positive thing, but at the same time it is something very negative. Because it blocks the decision to act. At certain moments you think the time has come, the time for you to get off the pavement and go into the street, enough.

If you wait to be three, thirty or thirty million, it's over. Let me tell you a little story that I experienced personally. I am Sicilian. In a small town in Sicily, Castelverano, near Palermo, in the fifties there were anarchist comrades doing anarcho-syndicalist activity. And at some point they became representatives in that small town, it was the municipal elections. And people were saying to them, 'Go, now you are going to the town hall, so you'll be able to do what you've been saying for thirty years.' 'Oh no', the comrades reply, 'we are anarchists, we don't vote.' The people said the anarchists are crazy. For thirty years they have been saying that we must change things and when they could make a difference at the town hall, they don't want to go. That's the contradiction, you see. If you make a certain discourse, a quantitative discourse, a time could come when people agree with you, but then you have to go right to the end, because if you're not going to, then you're a jerk. Speaking biologically: what are you talking about if you've been talking about shit from the start?

So, back to our discussion. The project is something that must develop from affinity, but where there is a *repressive project of the State against a certain reality* – why do I say *a certain reality,* because power obviously has a total repressive project that concerns all reality, but at some point we begin to see nuances that affect some sides, or some part, for example the population of a certain area, that always happens. For example here there is the question of the maxi-prison, it only affects part of Belgium, it doesn't touch all of Belgium. So we are before a specific repressive act. The State wants to achieve its global repressive project, with a specific act that affects a certain part of the territory, a certain number of people and all that. Anarchists, one can obviously organize to do something to stop this project.

They must organize by themselves or with the people. This is a big problem, it is not easy to decide. Because, look, there are comrades who don't agree about doing things with people. I know many. They agree of course to do things in a situation of specific struggle, but in parallel.

theory – a privileged place. In the anarchist group I look for my comrades with whom to do things, and I can't embrace the first comrade that arrives tonight and that I've never seen in my life, and propose doing a holdup together. I would be crazy if I did that. So I have to try to build reciprocal knowledge with him. But this knowledge is not friendship, it's not love, it's not knowledge based on culture, on the ability to understand the story of our life, my problems, my needs, my desires… no, it's not that. It is built on the specific knowledge of… I was thinking of the word *physisité* . I have before me a man, a woman, it is a living body that I have before me, someone who is talking to me, but the words don't say anything to me, someone with little gestures, little reactions, I must look at that these reactions, I have to investigate them, to see what kind of guy he is, what capabilities he has, and only after I start to know him, have some frequentation, I have a few little experiences with him, banal, everyday if you like, stupid.

How can we put it, we eat together for example, I see how he eats, what he eats, this comrade, if he starts breaking my balls on his selection of eating and all that, if for him this is the most important thing in his life, well, it's not a good *affinitaire* , I have no affinity with him, it's not for me. For example, to give things a name, if I have before me a comrade who is a vegetarian and talks all the time about his problems of food, this is something that doesn't interest me. But if he starts talking to me about things we can do together, how to find the tools to do things together – we understand each other when I use the general word 'things'?

Things that seek to transform the reality we have before us of course. Someone once said to me, 'But these are small things, how do you want to transform reality with a little thing, with the search for small instruments or is it just for training, a kind of revolutionary sport?' I didn't agree. These assertions were stupid in my opinion. Because it is these little things that make one see availability, capacity. It has happened, for example, that I have found myself with a comrade that I thought I knew well, studying an action together, whatever it was, let's not go into details of course, studying it in every detail — eh, remember, we're talking about affinity. So we studied all that, the table covered in papers, things, measurements, accounts of movements to go and check and all that. And then, when we got to the door – because it was necessary to go through it — the comrade freezes, stops outside the door. It's not his fault, it's my fault. That is to say it's my fault, because you have to go through it, I can't go alone, I have to go with him. If he doesn't want to go through that door and freezes, it's my fault. It's my fault because I didn't indi-

viduate affinity with him. I was wrong, that's all. So we try to solve the problem, one way or the other, and turn back. So to get back to our problem: affinity is the basis for looking for the comrades with whom I can develop my revolutionary project. It is not a question of number. It isn't that it takes fifty comrades.

Even two people, two comrades, also three, four, are an affinity group. The affinity group must participate in the life of the anarchist group within which the group finds itself, it must do all the things the anarchist group does. Revolutionary propaganda, discussions, debates, demonstrations, everything you like, but it must also have the awareness of being a different little thing and provide itself with the means for the action it wants to achieve in the present or in the future, alone as an affinity group.

And try to understand that this can be connections with other affinity groups that form in the same anarchist group or elsewhere in another group, in another city, another country; and establishing collaborative relationships. Because some objectives cannot be achieved with just the group of two, three comrades. For some objectives perhaps you need to be forty people, and then there are maybe four, five, ten affinity groups. This arithmetical mechanism which can be a little disgusting seen from the outside, is an essential thing to see how the mechanism of a project works. It is something that must have an organizational base. We cannot leave it to the spontaneity of each person, each comrade.

I've always been of the opinion that we have not thought enough about the difficulty of understanding the concept of affinity. Because there are always quid pro quos returning, because comrades ask themselves, 'but why can't that be done with the whole anarchist group?' 'Why can we not talk about things to be done all together in a group. Things to do all together within a group, or else – even worse – in the square with people and all that stuff?'. No, I think we must learn to establish different levels in which one is acting. In a different way.

Going towards insurrection means, or I think it could mean, moving towards a different situation from that in which we find ourselves. But move alone? Move only through affinity groups? No, because at some point the single affinity group eventually ends up chasing its own tail, it goes round and round and this is meaningless. For example, they have means they could use but remain unused. They have knowledge, studies of reality, research. And by reality, I also mean topography. Topography. For example in all my life I have never known an anarchist who can read a military map. Oh, a military map, eh! It is made by the army. And now

he finds himself in the countryside and can't read the military map, he confuses a tree with a hole and falls down the hole. Then, but that's not enough because what does it mean that I can read a military map and I do nothing? Then there is the situation where it is power that gives us a taste and offers us an unacceptable repressive model – let's put aside for now the concept of the people — it is unacceptable for us, for anarchists, unacceptable. But it can also be that it is the anarchists themselves who are seeking an objective to attack, why not? For example here there is the repressive project of the maxi-prison that they want to build, it is a proposal that the State has made against reality to transform it for its benefit, of course, according to its plans, and that's one thing.

But the initiative can also be taken by the anarchist group, the affinity groups coordinated between them and all that, that can also happen, no? That is to say, the study of reality, one cannot always be 'waiting for repression', we can take the initiative. Obviously, the thing changes, it changes a lot, because sometimes someone has said to me 'Well, there are always repressive forms, the mere existence of the State is a repressive act, so it's easy for us to attack anything.'

I don't agree with that too much. What can it mean to attack the cop passing in the street, it is an expression of the State, it is the State that is walking past me. It's an extremely complicated consideration of the development of repression that is walking inside a single individual, with his uniform and everything. No, I don't like that, it seems a small thing, it seems to me an act of cowardice; more than cowardice it seems a lack of analysis. It seems to me as if one wasn't able to do something more important and so we did the smallest thing, easier, nearer, closer to hand.

Well no, because what we are talking about is analysis, that is to say, the project, and the project must somehow have a certain, how do you say, capacity to develop. And in the very development of the project, you see how many things you can do to attack before or alongside the moment in which we are attacked. We are anarchists, our DNA (pardon me the word), is attack, not waiting. I look at the traditional anarchist organizations we have sometimes defined as organizations of synthesis. These are organizations that wait, they wait to develop, to become big and numerous.

For example the Spanish situation in 1936 developed in a terrible way in my opinion because of quantity. Because if you think that in the CNT there were one million two hundred thousand members pushing on the organization, 'Well, do something, no?', 'Go and lead our situation, we