



# Insurrection or Revolution?

June 20, 2016

*Udine, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2016*

## **A few points for thought**

We are used to considering the words ‘insurrection’ and ‘revolution’ to mean the same thing. But do they really?

A revolution is a radical change of the existing order. Like reformism it seeks to change the existing order, with the difference that with reformism the change is gradual rather than radical. Theoretically the three methods, reform, revolution and insurrection, could or rather should assume the same basic impulse of the negation of the existent, given that – as reason would have it – if one desires something other and affirms it, one is denying the present.

Besides not existing, the future is the negation of the present on a theoretical level. In the present historical context – the aborted debate on insurrection and revolution in the configuration of revolutionary perspectives of the past is another question – the revolutionary horizon is an abstraction of the *other* present, that is to say the future, the ultimate non-place, it being an absolutely other time, also in relation to the plan of ongoing existence, to use an Aristotelian category. However, apart from a few distinctions to be considered elsewhere, reform, revolution and insurrection say nothing to us about the other they would like, only that they aspire to

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the other and the method they mean to use to achieve it. What we have said so far, and will say, concerns one of the two elements to be gone into here, namely why insurrection is to be preferred to revolution.

But there is another aspect, that of context, which leads to the same conclusions, whether we like it or not. Here we are talking of the historical impossibility of a revolution.

Why struggle then? This is the question posed by the militant, the revolutionary. But this question will remain unanswered for a while. More importantly, it must be stated that – be it revolution or insurrection – the revolutionary theorisation of the future society, i.e. of utopia (without any connotations) is worth nothing without action in the present, or is taking strength away from action in the present. In the 70s, when the eventuality of a revolution was a little more credible (although perhaps this was only crushed into geopolitical bipolarisation), Raoul Vaneigem wrote: *'After all nothing is more urgent to those who strive [...] for widespread self-management than to intervene without hesitation or reservation against a system that doesn't destroy itself if not by destroying us at the same time.'*<sup>1</sup> Today the only credible revolutionary perspective, i.e. today's only credible perspective of radical change, is that of a system that will only be destroyed if it 'destroys itself' while 'destroying us at the same time.' By 'destroys itself' I mean by means of phenomena, elements and/or reactions that pertain to it because they have been produced by it or that it has desired or foreseen. This could be the case of the system being destroyed or radically changed by a world war, ISIS, the impact of a meteorite, an epidemic, an eco-disaster, a nuclear disaster or the conquest of political power by neo-fascist groups (Salvini, CasaPound, Le Pen, Trump, Golden Dawn, British nationalists, German neo-nazis, etc.). In any case the so-called Movement, the forces working for revolution in a socialist

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<sup>1</sup> R. Vaneigem, *Terrorismo o rivoluzione*, Edizioni Anarchismo, Trieste, 2015, p. 11

The struggle is here and now. Victory is here and now. For our victory is the defeat of the enemy's desire for social peace. It is the gesture of rebellion, fire, destruction, annihilation, a wound inflicted on the world's morality, iconoclastic, the flames that start off from any one of the points of the technological monster. Because any authority's reason for being is the ability to guarantee itself, to exercise authority. The very existence of a cry that denies every authority, of active nihilism armed against this open air prison, therefore, is the greatest victory, here and now, that one can desire. Because the existence of subversion implies the defeat of dominion's will to be total.

For order is not order if someone, be they even just one, the only one, rejoices, mad, in the Total War, in the night of chaos!

sense – even if the word is out of date and no longer used in its historical sense – would have no role to play, as these forces would be incomparably scarce in the face of any of the elements mentioned. To hold on to the illusion that the opposite is true is one of the main causes of the crystallization of the impossibility.

Alfredo Maria Bonanno seems to suggest something similar when he talks about the *'illusions of the past, which in disappearing also took with them brave willingness, engagement beyond all limits, the smell of blood and even tears of mercy.'*<sup>2</sup>

However, beyond the illusory character of a revolutionary hypothesis in a traditional sense, Vaneigem was clear: if one wants to create an other world (of self-management) it is necessary to destroy this one first. In addition to this, the factual death – other than in revolutionary militants' dreams and utopias – of a traditional revolutionary hypothesis must not also be the death of courage, courage which would no longer be revolutionary but simply insurrectional. At this point the historical fact and the preferred horizon mentioned above join together. We can't make the revolution, even if we wanted to, and the only possible radical change will come from causes that are extraneous to us, although such change would still be preferable to the existent. A catastrophe, for example, could put an end to the techno-industrial system. In any case, even assuming we were able to make a revolution, an insurrection would be preferable.

As we said, revolution is a radical change. Beyond its being radical, it is first and foremost change. It is political change. Change does not only imply the destruction of the existing order, like insurrection, but also the substitution of the old order with another, one society with another society. But as any society is authoritarian by nature, an anarchist revolution is not possible.

A Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist, Maoist revolution was perfectly possible and coherent in other historical periods: the imposition,

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<sup>2</sup> A.M. Bonanno, *Nota introduttiva*, in R. Vaneigem, *op. cit.*, p. 5

arms in hand, so in a radical way, of an order, that of State capitalism, to take the place of a previous order, that of free market capitalism. On the contrary an anarchist revolution would always bring authoritarian results; so, unlike a Marxist revolution, it would be a contradiction in terms.

Alfredo Cospito rejects the idea of revolution thus: *'I don't aspire to any future 'paradisiac' socialist alchemy, I do not put my faith in any social class; my revolt without revolution is individual, existential, totalizing, absolute, armed.'*<sup>3</sup> A clear distinction between revolution and insurrection is also made by Max Stirner, very well as always.

In order to be different from the current one, a future society would have to be based on principles established by the revolutionaries. As soon as the revolution is over, the ex-revolutionaries would have to ensure that these values were applied. Of course such values and such a society would have enemies because, luckily, there are and I hope there always will be (the victory of the here and now against the totalitarianism of all authorities!), enemies of whatever existing order, as Renzo Novatore said, including himself among them. There will always be passionate lovers of chaos. So the ex-revolutionaries will establish an ex-revolutionary police. And as there will also be external enemies until the revolution becomes global, an ex-revolutionary army will also be implemented. But once these enemies of the revolution are identified, what to do with them? Here the ex-revolutionary prisons arise. And what if some enemy of the revolution was considered to be unaware of their being an enemy? Why not to take the chance to build – or rather reopen! – ex-revolutionary mental asylums too?

In short the revolutionary society, albeit anarchist in its initial proclamations, would become exactly like the society that exists today. When I say 'exactly like' I am not referring to measurements taken with some libertarian thermometer. The degree of libertarianism in a revolution is a swindle. If the germ of authority still exists,

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<sup>3</sup> A. Cospito, in *"Croce Nera Anarchica"*, issue 0, 2014

even if not identified in words such as authoritarianism, absolutism, etc., there will be authority and there will not be freedom. Freedom is either total or doesn't exist. One cannot consider oneself free simply because one is a little less a slave. A tiger is either free in the jungle or is a prisoner in a circus or a zoo. The question of whether or not the captive tiger is held in chains concerns the torture inflicted by authority, it has nothing to do with its being free. If you are in a cage you are not free. And if you are chained up in that cage and the chains are taken off, it doesn't make your cage an anarchist cage.

Some examples of that are Makhnovist Ukraine and the Spain of the civil war. In the first case, just to mention a few of the horrors of the past, the Makhnovists were opposed to Maria Grigor'evna Niki-forova continuing to carry out direct action against authority even after the revolution of the Bolsheviks, allies of Makhno and Aršinov (notwithstanding a few quarrels concerning the chains of the caged tiger). In Spain on the other hand, under the domination of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (F.A.I.) and the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo – Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores (C.N.T.-A.I.T.), amidst anarchist-ministers and other gems of History, the death penalty was imposed even on the production line.<sup>4</sup>

The historical impossibility of a socialist revolution and the disgust that an enemy of every form of authority feels towards the revolutionary hypothesis and the idea of a revolutionary society, don't in any way imply that the courage to attack authority, the enemy, has to die along with the revolution. On the contrary, it is politics that must die along with the revolution, the practice of begging for consensus in order to govern the polis. But in the absence of a polis or a society to be managed, politics would have no reason to be. After a deliberate reformulation of authority (revolution), why stop fighting?

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<sup>4</sup> H.M. Enzensberger, *La breve estate dell'anarchia. Vita e morte di Buenaventura Durruti*, Feltrinelli ed.