

Errico Malatesta

**Note to the article “Individualism
and Anarchism” by Adamas**

August 1924

Adamas' reply to my article in n. 13 shows that I did not express my thought well, and induces me to add some clarifications.

I claimed that "individualist anarchism and communist anarchism are the same, or nearly so, in terms of moral motivations and ultimate goals".

I know that one could counter my claim with hundreds of texts and plenty of deeds of self-proclaimed individualist anarchists, which would demonstrate that individualist anarchist and communist anarchist are separated by something of a moral abyss.

However, I deny that that kind of individualists can be included among anarchists, despite their liking for calling themselves so.

If anarchy means non-government, non-domination, non-oppression by man over man, how can one call himself anarchist without lying to himself and the others, when he frankly claims that he would oppress the others for the satisfaction of his *Ego*, without any scruple or limit, other than that drawn by his own strength? He can be a rebel, because he is being oppressed and he fights to become an oppressor, as other nobler rebels fight to destroy any kind of oppression; but he sure cannot be anarchist. He is a would-be bourgeois, a would-be tyrant, who is unable to accomplish his dreams of dominion and wealth by his own strength and by legal means, and therefore he approaches anarchists to exploit their moral and material solidarity.

Therefore, I think the question is not about "communists" and "individualists", but rather about anarchists and non-anarchists. And we, or at least many of us, were quite wrong in discussing a certain kind of alleged "anarchist individualism" as if it really was one of the various tendencies of anarchism, instead of fighting it as one of the many disguises of authoritarianism.

However, *Adamas* says, "if one strips individualist anarchism of all that is not anarchist, there is no individualist anarchism whatsoever left". We disagree about this.

Morally, anarchism is sufficient unto itself; but to be translated into facts it needs concrete forms of material life, and it is the preference for one or other form which differentiates the various anarchist schools of thought.

In the anarchist milieu, communism, individualism, collectivism, mutualism and all the intermediate and eclectic programmes are simply the ways considered best for achieving freedom and solidarity in economic life; the ways believed to correspond more closely with justice and freedom for the distribution of the means of production and the products of labour among men.

Bakunin was an anarchist, and he was a collectivist, an outspoken enemy of communism because he saw in it the negation of freedom and, therefore, of human dignity. And with Bakunin, and for a long time after him, almost all the Spanish anarchists were collectivists (*collective property of soil, raw materials and means*

of production, and assignment of the entire product of labour to the producer, after deducting the necessary contribution to social charges), and yet they were among the most conscious and consistent anarchists.

Others for the same reason of defence and guarantee of liberty declare themselves to be individualists and they want each person, to have as individual property the part that is due to him of the means of production and therefore the free disposal of the products of his labour.

Others invent more or less complicated system of mutuality. But in the long run it is always the searching for a more secure guarantee of freedom which is the common factor among anarchists, and which divides them into different schools.

We are communist, because we believe that a way of social life based on brotherhood, with no oppressed nor oppressors, can be better accomplished through a freely established solidarity and a free cooperation in the interest of all, aiming at the fullest possible satisfaction of everyone's needs rather than the *right* to a higher or lower recompense.

We believe that the distribution of the natural means of production and the determination of the exchange value of things, both necessary in every system except communism, could be hardly be accomplished without struggle and injustice, which might eventually end up in the establishment of new forms of authority and governments. On the other hand, we readily admit the danger involved in trying to apply communism before its desire and awareness be deep-rooted, and to a larger extent than allowed by the objective conditions of production and social relations: a parasitic bureaucracy could arise, which would centralize everything in its hands and become the worst of governments.

Therefore we remain communist in our sentiment and aspiration, but we want to leave freedom of action to the experimentation of all ways of life that can be imagined and desired.

For us, it is necessary and sufficient that everyone have complete freedom, and nobody can monopolize the means of production and live on someone else's work.

* * *

Adamas also talks about the necessity of "an organized, homogeneous, continuative anarchist movement, connected for a common action of struggle and demand". He also says that our propaganda in deeds must not consist of "postponing action, initiative, organization, etc. until all who call themselves anarchists agree about what is to be done. Rather, we ourselves who already agree, must take immediate action, according to our general and tactical programs, without

refraining from it for a silly fear of hurting the feelings of the dissenters belonging to the various fractions and tendencies”.

I perfectly agree with him; however, I believe he is wrong when he thinks the “individualists” are to blame if what he wishes has not been done so far, or it has been done insufficiently and badly.

In my opinion, the blame is on a state of mind of the anarchists, deriving from wrong ideas spread since the origins of our movement, which made them balk at any practical plan of action. Such errors depend on a kind of *natural providentialism*, which led to believe that human events happen automatically, *naturally*, without preparation, without organization, without preconceived plans. Just as many among us think the revolution will come by itself, when *the time is ripe*, by the spontaneous action of the masses, so they also think that after the revolution the *popular spontaneity* will suffice for everything and that there is no need to foresee and prepare anything. This is the reason of the wrongs pointed out by *Adamas*, not the “individualists”, which have always been a very small minority among us, after all, generally without credit and without influence.

The maxim “anarchy is the natural order”, which, in my opinion, is diametrically opposed to the truth, was not invented by the individualists!

Anyway, we can talk about this some other time.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright
May 21, 2012



Errico Malatesta
Note to the article "Individualism and Anarchism" by Adamas
August 1924

From *Pensiero e Volontà*, n. 15, August 1, 1924
Retrieved on March 4th, 2009 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu