

Head Up. Authoritarian Turn of New Form and Anti-anarchist Repression in Italy

*Contribution for the debate at the anarchist space Motín by anarchists editors of "Vetriolo".
Madrid, February 27, 2021*

Thanks to the comrades for the invitation, we regret that more comrades could not come. The reason for such a small presence is the restrictions related to the repressive laws enacted by governments, under the pretext of the pandemic. However, we would be happy to come back for further discussions as soon as possible.

On the pages of "Vetriolo", we have defined the repressive climate in Italy, and in general throughout the democratic West, as an "authoritarian turn of new form". Let us try to better explain the meaning of this definition.

One of the reasons that prompted us to search for a specific definition for the repressive climate of this historical phase is our dissatisfaction with the classic categories of anti-fascism. Some of us don't believe that there isn't in fact a fascist danger today. Obviously there are many fascists and they are very dangerous, but some comrades editors of the paper don't believe that there is a historical and political danger of an establishment of fascist regimes in the West. In fact, we think that fascism was a response of the state to the revolutionary danger. Since there is unfortunately no danger for the power of a social revolution today, we also don't believe that the liberal state will turn into a fascist state.

Not all the comrades of the paper agree with this deduction. However, we are all certain of the inadequacy of the classical categories with which fascism has been faced in the last century. For example, the traditional response to fascism has been embodied in the so-called "frontism". In Spain you have experienced the classic case of this "frontism": the Popular Front. The Popular Front was a broad alliance of all those forces which, for various and often radically divergent reasons, were against the advance of Franco's forces. It was therefore an alliance in which authoritarian forces and anti-authoritarian individuals, bourgeois forces and proletarian forces came together. The historical horrors of the Popular Front can be seen in the moment when anarchists even became ministers of the republican government. It's a historical truth that the social revolution wasn't defeated by Franco, but before him by the forces of the Popular Front themselves: the disarming of the militias, the restitution to the old owners or nationalisation of the self-managed companies in Catalonia, the refusal to grant independence to the colonial territories in Morocco, the murder of numerous anarchists by the communists, etc. The frontist choices weren't only ethically infamous, but in addition they were also counterproductive for the armed struggle against fascism itself. In Italy, we have seen in the CLN – the National Liberation Committee – an even worse example of frontism. The CLN was such a vast alliance that it brought together communists, socialists, Christian democrats and even monarchists. All united with the aim of driving out the fascists and the German occupiers. A front so broad to have expressed, at first, even a former fascist hierarch such as Pietro Badoglio as Prime Minister of the "liberated" territories.

Since we believe that anti-fascism carries with it, in its very DNA the germ of frontism, we prefer not to speak of a new fascist threat for the historical phase we are living through, but of an authoritarian turn of new form. This means that even the anarchist response, the only revolutionary response possible today, must be an anti-authoritarian response of new form.

This hypothesis of ours is not only based on past events, but is also reflected in present dynamics. We have witnessed over the past decade a struggle of power around the world between the nationalist forces, the so-called sovereignists, of the new right wing of Trump, Salvini, Bolsonaro, Orban, etc., and the liberist forces, the forces of globalisation, embodied by the europeanist elites, the European Central Bank, the Democratic Party in the United States. Both forces on the field in this clash of power are our enemies. Both these factions of the world bourgeoisie are the bearers of the authoritarian turn of new form. To concentrate only on fighting the right-wing forces would risk making us objective allies of the liberists, the European Union, the multinationals, the American left. We have seen this in the USA, where the anti-fascist and anti-sexist struggles have lastly been salvaged to bring victory to Biden. A new president who threatens to be much more aggressive than Trump in terms of foreign policy (he is already threatening Russia, China and Iran).

Governments change, but the politics are always the same. The authoritarian turn of new form has accelerated incredibly during this last year of pandemic. Laws that are liberticidal towards individuals' leisure time and at the same time extremely permissive towards industrial production have been the measure of all governments, of all political

colours. Social control has been achieved through new technologies, fines, media terrorism and mass obedience. One can only leave home to go and be exploited.

The situation in Italy is particularly harsh. At the level of mass repression, we had the harshest lockdown in the whole West. While 60 million individuals were literally locked under house arrest for about 10 weeks, Confindustria lobbied to leave their factories open, causing the infection to spread and thus making the rest of the population continue the restrictive measures.

The collective repression laws of the last year have added to an already very severe counterrevolutionary legislation. The special laws written between the 1970s and 1980s of the last century to oppose the propagation of armed struggle have never been abolished, but rather have been progressively hardened over the last thirty years.

Today, many anarchists are placed under Special Surveillance, a police measure that doesn't even pass through a court of law, which prevents the targeted comrade from engaging in any public activity, participating in demonstrations, meeting with convicted, leaving home in the evening or changing city without first informing the police. If these measures are violated, the risk is imprisonment or an extension of the period of Special Surveillance.

Dozens of anarchists in recent years have been arrested thanks to article 270bis of the penal code. An article that hits "subversive associations", so it targets the very fact that you associate, regardless of the specific crime you are accused of committing. The punishment for 270bis is up to 15 years in prison, in special detention regimes (usually prisoners of political nature are locked up in AS2, "High Security 2" sections, but there are still three communist prisoners in Italy today who are locked up in 41bis, the hard prison for the mafia). Article 270bis has been used over the years to hit not only those accused of direct actions, but also the editors of anarchist papers, blogs, and all those who spread the claim texts, declared their sympathy with the content or practices expressed therein, organised solidarity events or collected money for the trials.

We tell all this without any victimisation. The state strikes, often striking at random, because it's attacked. If there has been a force that has attacked power in this new century, particularly in Europe and Latin America, it has been anarchism. Recently, two comrades, Anna Beniamino and Alfredo Cospito, were sentenced to 16 years and 6 months and 20 years respectively, in the context of a maxi-trial that essentially saw the history of the entire Federazione Anarchica Informale (Informal Anarchist Federation) on trial. The history of the insurgency of the last 20 years is reduced by power, through justice and mass media, to the story of the criminal events of a few comrades. A history they hope to bury, burying these comrades under years of prison.

So we will not be complaining. The state is becoming more and more authoritarian as the social control of capital comes increasingly into crisis. From this point of view, it seems to us that the current global pandemic doesn't represent any qualitative change, but an element of acceleration in a process that has already been underway for a long time.

Therefore, we would like to highlight how this authoritarian turn of new form, which affects anarchists and now generally affects the whole of society, is currently continuing – in Italy and throughout the world – without any effective modification of the democratic political envelope of states. Constitutions have not been suspended, parliaments have not been closed, trade unions have not been dissolved. This is a peculiar novelty of the new authoritarian regime in the 21st century. Unlike a hundred years ago, today's authoritarian turn takes place without coups or "fascist revolutions". It's in the context of democratic formality, even in Italy in the context of a parliamentary republic with generally weak and short-lived governments. In short, the state today is so refined that it's perfectly capable of effectively suspending the "freedoms" of its subjects without in any way damaging its formal democratic structure, even preserving its ministerial crises and travails.

So we must avoid falling into the trap of a defensive dynamic, of mere resistance. There is no need to resist the advance of a regime, there is no need to form a common front with the democrats, the liberals, the left. Rather, we have to declare failed the social organisation based on the authority of the state and the property of capital. Moving us to the attack against a rotten society, a society that is now in fact kept alive in "intensive care". Cut the wires, pull the plug. And return to breathing.