



## Defence is not the best attack

### *Open (desperate) letter to those who eat our same bread*

Dear comrades,

it is to you, and only you ('wreckers', not consensus interceptors; avowed dreamers, not pragmatists when required – militants and opportunists please refrain) that we are turning to in these dark times, when every horizon seems to be closing in on us. To you, known over the years in Italy and around the world, or even completely unknown, the only ones who can understand our current state of mind and our words.

Many argue that those who have no hope to convey should keep quiet. Although this would explain the silence into which many of us are sliding, we don't agree. In fact, in a way we think exactly the opposite: those who should shut up are the ones who persist in peddling enchanting narratives (from heavenly paradise as a reward for earthly resignation to communism as the ineluctable outcome of capitalist development, passing through the insurrection that comes with every citizens' mobilisation or street riot). Especially now – with humanity well on the way to extinction, a planet on the verge of ecological collapse, a social massacre that gets worse every day, a war that brandishes nuclear weapons, voluntary servitude so generalised as to make any aspiration to even the slightest freedom ridiculous – it seems to us more urgent and essential than ever to look deeply into reality and not to skim the surface of things in order to draw comforting illusions from it. That is why this letter is desperate, because it is born of discouragement in the face of a situation that in all respects appears hopeless, with no way out.

**We are not hiding it.** We have gambled on the encounter between thought and action, we are besieged by opinion and representation. We have invoked the Ego and its Own, we are surrounded by the Selfie and its vanity. We have tried to spread utopia, we are submerged in realism. We have loved the most excessive and singular ideas, we are at the mercy of the most homologising and massifying propaganda. We longed for the awakening of consciousness, we find ourselves trapped in the calculus of the algorithm. We have prioritised ethics, we are swept away by politics. Poetry may have survived Auschwitz (and television?), but critical thinking has been annihilated in Silicon Valley.

We have become like the German revolutionaries encountered by Stig Dagerman in the immediate post-war period: living ruins, dignified but unfrequented. And now? What ( do we ) have left to say now, when words have lost all meaning



everywhere? High up as well as low down, in palaces as well as in the streets, everything has turned into querulous chatter, a huge farce that leaves one dismayed and bewildered. Yet another demonstration of this can be seen in recent days in the reaction to the indefinite hunger strike undertaken by the anarchist prisoner Alfredo Cospito, on whose announced, predicted, feared, desired by some, corpse, a true masquerade has unfolded.

Have you ever heard of Satanta, i.e. White Bear, chief warrior of the Kiowa, one of the many Native American tribes? Tall, of massive build, he took part in many battles, distinguishing himself by his courage. He was one of the first Indian chiefs to be tried by a white court. He served a couple of years in prison and was then released, but fearing that he might arouse the warlike instincts of the younger Indians, he was put back in prison again shortly afterwards. For some years White Bear spent hours and hours peering through the bars. His eyes looked north, the hunting ground of his people. When he realised that he would never again ride free in the middle of the forests and prairies, when he realised that he would never again sleep in a tepee (a tent with a circular base, symbol of movement and equality), when he realised that he would never see the other members of his tribe again, but would rot in a rectangular concrete cell, he decided to end it all. He threw himself out of a prison hospital window in Huntsville, Texas, on 11 October 1878. An understandable choice, his. A human choice.

**Alfredo Cospito** is also tall and until recently of massive build; he is not a Native American, he is an anarchist who ended up in prison over ten years ago for having shot the legs of the chief manager of atomic energy in Italy, CEO of Ansaldo Nucleare of Genova. He has been on hunger strike since October 20th in protest against the 41 bis prison regime, which he has been subjected to since last May. His life is in danger, but he has no intention of giving up. He says he will go on to his last breathe; knowing his stubbornness and determination, he is capable of it. He alone can say what he can and what he will not accept. He alone can decide what to do with his own body. How to live, how to die. And why.

So far, nothing to object to. To each his own choices, whether shared or not. However, unlike White Bear, Alfredo Cospito has made a political choice. He is defying death to pursue a specific claim. With his hunger strike he wants to obtain the abolition of 41 bis, i.e. means to push the State to delete the so-called 'hard prison' from its rules. As the days pass, as more or less resounding solidarity actions are spreading all over the world and as a tragic outcome approaches, his battle is stirring up more and more of an outcry. That reactionaries are outraged by this 'blackmail' of institutions by a convict is in the order of things and not worth dwelling on. In the same way, it is no wonder that progressives or pseudo-dissidents of various stripes are rushing to ride this 'civilised, non-violent protest', which is why we can only shrug our shoulders at the solidarity expressed by the usual



beautiful souls (priests, intellectuals, artists), and turn our noses up at that expressed by the filthy figures (such as magistrates, ex-ministers and neo-fascists)... It is the game of sides, and there is no point in trying to make sense of it.

Having said that, however, we cannot help but pose a question to those with the ears and hearts to hear it: would so much honeyed cross-party interest have been possible if the underlying claim was not in itself of a political-humanitarian nature?

What we mean is well understood by the lawyer of the anarchist himself, when he declares that «the great merit of Cospito is to have brought back into the public debate what 41 bis is and whether or not it is compatible with the Constitution». These are not simply the words of a lawyer doing his job to the best of his ability, it is the only possible perspective of the question raised: if the task of prison is to re-educate, as they pretend to make us believe, what is the point of a harsh punitive regime such as 41 bis? Shouldn't the State abolish it, or at least limit it as much as possible (to mafiosi who dissolve children in acid, goes the popular refrain, as if it were not well known that the State freed those mafiosi as soon as they repented)? It may be the subject of public debate, but it is still a purely institutional issue. Not social, nor popular, nor class, much less nihilist, but institutional. This is noted and reiterated in the appeal in favour of Cospito addressed 'to the Prison Administration, the Minister of Justice and the Government' and signed by dozens and dozens of jurists, magistrates and academics in various capacities: «To configure as defiance or blackmail the attitude of those who make the body the ultimate instrument of protest and affirmation of their identity is to betray our Constitution, which places human life and the dignity of the person at the top of the values, to whose protection the State is entrusted, for its own legitimacy and credibility, not as a concession to those who oppose it. Therein lies the difference between democratic States and authoritarian regimes».

Here, one only has to read such sentences and the names of the signatories to understand what really motivates their concern: the attempt to salvage what can be saved in the total shipwreck the law has run into. In a sense, those who say they want to save Alfredo Cospito to defend democracy, since the latter is so delegitimised that there is a need to counterbalance its aberrations with some noble gesture. Saving the life of an anarchist who has never killed anyone could be just the occasion. «Yes, it's true, we killed the insurgent prisoners of Modena and slaughtered those of Ivrea, we have made the lives of millions of people impossible, but come on, after all, we were lenient with that anarchist...». This is what can drive Gherardo Colombo to be concerned about Cospito, he who will always be remembered as the judge who killed Pinelli a second time. Motivation that can also be extended to those who, like Adriano Sofri or Donatella Di Cesare, participated in the lynching of opponents of the health pass.





But all the occasional outpourings of good feelings in this world are no longer able to hide the stark fact: democracy is an authoritarian regime. And this, after three years of humiliation of human life and dignity by the State in the name of public health, is no longer a radical criticism formulated by a few hotheads; it is a banal observation.

You don't need to be an anarchist to understand that the Constitution is nothing but arse-paper, one need only look at the repeated public use of it by its own admirers in recent times. Even those who have built up solid erudition and philosophical reputation on the interpretation of the law have recently been forced to admit that they can no longer confront a jurist or anyone who denounces the way in which the law and the constitution have been manipulated and betrayed, not put the law and the constitution in question in the first place. It is perhaps necessary, to not keep talking in the present tense, to recall that neither Mussolini nor Hitler needed to question existing constitutions in Italy and Germany, but found within them the devices they needed to establish their regimes? Is it possible, that is, that the gesture of those who are trying to base their battle on the constitution and rights today is already defeated at the outset? It is as if certain procedures or principles which we believed in or, rather, pretended to believe in have now shown their true face, which we cannot fail to see. It is paradoxical that what even an academic like Agamben has managed to understand escapes most of the subversives clamouring for an end to 41 bis today. Drawn by moral pressure to avert the death of an anarchist, they fail to see the point of their mobilisation.

Suffice it to observe how, on this ongoing hunger strike, the tone remains the same if you go from the palaces and courtrooms to the streets. In fact, you become pathetic, to say the least. Never mind the embarrassing panegyric to the sanctity of martyrdom. But what can we say about that continuous distinction between bad mafiosi and good anarchists, or the deplorable denunciation of the disproportion between deeds committed and punishments inflicted (certainly nothing new, given the 14 years' imprisonment for the days of Genoa 2001), Appropriate points of merit in the courts, but decidedly nauseating in the mouths of those who no longer have the audacity to advocate always and only the destruction of prisons? What about the usual 'quantitative mania', which does so much to inflate but nothing to grow, cultivated by those who register the occasional burps of conscience from magistrates and intellectuals as evidence of broad consensus?

Well, it is certainly impossible to say what is more unintentionally comical, whether the proposal put forward by a Norwegian politician to award the Nobel Peace Prize to one of the greatest warlords (the NATO secretary), or the initiative of some 'anarchists' aimed at breaking the «deafening silence of the tenant of the Quirinale», to «awaken the conscience (and the blissful sleep...) of those who should protect the safeness of Alfredo». In learning from those who never cease to



declare themselves «in solidarity with Alfredo and his practices» that a head of State should watch over the health of an enemy of the State, one feels like paraphrasing the words of a famous French anarchist who went to the gallows – in the virtual war they have declared on the bourgeoisie, certain anarchists ask for protection; they do not give death, they demand not to suffer it.

Contrary to those who are basking in a mirage, inferring an electrifying weakness of the State from the expressions of some of the television journalists who comment on Cospito's hunger strike, to us it seems on the contrary that it is the anarchists to have become more than weak, authentic caricatures, when they are reduced to becoming megaphones of constitutional political battles. The State no longer even needs to liquidate the anarchist movement, which has liquidated itself by renouncing its own ideas in order to implement pragmatic tactical convergences.

If so much of the left is aligning itself with the anarchists today, it is not because it is compelled to do so by the force of events, but because these anarchists are now almost the only ones left to take up the call to «say something left-wing, something even not left-wing, something civilised... something» – such as calling for the abolition of 41 bis. Incidentally, have you wondered what glimmer of victory is possible in such a battle? Given that the agony of an anarchist in prison and a few smashed windows are unlikely to succeed in 2023 in breaking the State any more than the mafia bombs that exploded thirty years ago, what else remains on the table? The remission in his case of detention from 41 bis and the non-application of life imprisonment without appeal? Wow, what a great victory: he would only be looking at twenty years in prison under a high-security regime...

Forty years ago there were those who criticised the proposed amnesty for political prisoners following this reasoning: the moral pressure of four thousand bodies dying in solitude cannot justify bargaining with the State, one must not demand the release of comrades to resume the struggle, one must resume the struggle to impose the release of comrades.

Even taking into account the different historical contexts, a millennium has indeed passed if today we have come to the point of making the change of prison regime for one anarchist (plus three stalinists and a few hundred alleged mafiosi) the aim of mobilising an entire movement. One has a fine tale to tell about the anarchist extrapotence in the Italian situation as a whole, imagining today hordes of bourgeois angry at the State guilty of having «unleashed» the anarchists, just as yesterday someone imagined the resurrection of the Paris Commune under the skies of Venaüs.

The reality is that the State now dominates in such an unchallenged manner that it can afford anything, from letting anarchists rot in jail as it pleases to indicting trade unionists for extortion, to applying special surveillance to ecologist activists. Why



shouldn't it do this? Because it is unconstitutional? If it has locked up 60 million honest citizens with hardly a peep from anyone, indeed to the applause of many r-r-revolutionaries, it may well bury an anarchist dead or alive. Without even having to justify its actions. To whom should it be accountable? To the journalists? To the intellectuals? To the politicians? To jurists? To public opinion? To the subjects who are afraid of their own shadow and even of their own breath? To those subversives capable only of demanding that the State behave in a better, fairer, more just manner?

The victory of the State is truly total when its enemies are reduced to speaking its own language and show that they no longer want to storm the heavens (contenting themselves with defending a few dens on earth).

**Alfredo Cospito is still alive and continues his hunger strike.** He is doing what he can and what he can think of to get out of the hole in which he has been confined. But since he is in the hands of the State, and it is exclusively on institutional ground that this game is being played, there is no reason to be optimistic about his fate. The government has ample opportunity to juggle the situation. It may not give a damn and go ahead according to strutting patriotic tradition, it may prolong the prisoner's ordeal with force-feeding, it may show magnanimity today in order to be more cruel tomorrow. It may even show some humanitarian disposition and then pull the plug («oops, a complication intervened, we're sorry, we did everything, but you know how it is, his body was debilitated»). As every gambler knows, the house always wins in the long run.

«If the Sinopes condemned me to exile, I condemn them to stay in their homeland!» Diogenes the Cynic is said to have said. Art of putting on a good face or furious philosophy of life? Beloved comrades, we too are condemned to exile, to perpetual exile since there is no longer any place for us in this world.

One dream after another, one desire after another, one freedom after another, everything is being snatched away from us. And the knowledge that the extinction of the lovers of freedom will only just precede that of the advocates of authority is not much consolation to us. But here, in the midst of loneliness and despair, there is not only despondency, bitterness, melancholy, nausea. Here there is also what is called the courage of despair, that determination to try everything because one has nothing left to lose.

Let us find this courage. Let us condemn the domesticated bipeds to stay in their homeland, without wasting any more time chasing their parties, their classes, their movements. Let us enrich the ways of exile. Let us prepare to face solitude. Let us train ourselves to survive in the desert, to move in the desert, to fight in the desert. Without any more qualms, without any more pity. By furious philosophy of life, by vengeful philosophy of life.

Death, life lies in waiting.



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