Introduction

The history of anarchism is often approached as a simple and odd business. Anarchist collective action tends to be depicted as a succession of unconnected and hopeless initiatives: futile insurrectionary attempts by isolated and ill-equipped bands, such as the 1877 Benevento expedition led by Errico Malatesta and Carlo Cafiero, or spontaneous outbursts of rage by exasperated mobs in backward areas, such as was allegedly typical of Andalusian anarchism. In all cases, available historical evidence seems to leave little doubt about the anarchists' lack of preparation and organization, in stark contrast with their high-sounding proclaimed ends. Ultimately, the patent inconsistency and unsustainability of anarchist tactics support charges of irrationalism, as epitomized by E. J. Hobsbawm's influential depiction of anarchism as millenarian.1

There has been no lack of attempts to rescue anarchism from such dismissive accounts in the last three decades. Some of these have involuntarily reinforced stereotypes. For example, Peter Marshall, in his justified effort to dispel the customary association of anarchism with terrorism and violence, remarks that "at its most violent the [anarchists'] action has typically not gone much beyond throwing up barricades or entering a village armed with rudimentary weapons," just as the millenarian stereotype would have it.2 Still, the advent of the "new social history" has spurred new research on anarchism, which persuasively argues for the effectiveness and relevance of anarchism. To mention only a few examples, this literature includes the books of Bruce Nelson on the Haymarket affair, of Richard Sonn and Alexander Varias on French anarchism, of John Lear on Mexico, of Kirwin Shaffer on Cuba, and of Matthew Thomas on Great Britain.3

Most of these works leave aside the mode of operation of anarchist direct action and insurrectionary tactics-and the related stereotypes about them-to focus on anarchist culture and its ability to influence society. Yet in focusing on the effectiveness of anarchism such works have failed in their own way to do justice to its rationality, in the standard sense of coherence among desires, beliefs, and behavior. In emphasizing the realism of anarchism and its ability to grapple with issues in the here and now, the adaptability and effectiveness of anarchist means are not gauged by the anarchists' goals, which tend to be regarded as a dead letter at best, or a dead weight at worst, but in contrast to them. Thus, Nelson's and Lear's emphasis on workers' traditions implies that anarchism had an instrumental value for workers who embraced it without fully sharing its objectives; likewise, anarchist goals were ultimately a liability for the countercultures studied by Thomas; and for Sonn and Varias, anarchist diversity, which enabled anarchists to be in tune with the culture of their times, was also the very reason that precluded them from successfully pursuing their anarchist ends. From the perspective of rationality, those who share Hobsbawm's judgment of "monumental ineffectiveness," and those who seek to rescue anarchism from that charge, are two sides of the same irrationalist coin. Either way, anarchism is made sense of by introducing an element of irrationality, whether in the form of impossible aims, futile means, or absurd beliefs.

In contrast, the present article focuses on rationality, rather than on effectiveness. The two issues are distinct, as is commonly recognized in social sciences. An example is the debate on magical thought since Durkheim and Weber, with its rejection of Lévy-Bruhl's theory of "primitive
mentality." As Raymond Boudon puts it, "the case of magic is paradigmatic, since magical beliefs are by definition false beliefs," and therefore magic is ineffective; yet, "although their beliefs are without objective foundation, magicians have good reasons for believing what they believe," and therefore they are rational.4 This distinction is not equally familiar to historians; thus, the anarchists' failure to carry through a successful revolution tends to be taken as evidence against their rationality.

Moreover, the focus of the present article is precisely on the organizational background of anarchist insurrectionary tactics. With few notable exceptions, such as Jerome Mintz's admirable Anarchists of Casas Viejas, facile and often dismissive stereotypes on this subject have remained relatively unchallenged by the most recent historiography, partly because of the inherent obstacles to the study of anarchist organization, as George Richard Esenwein has remarked in his book on the ideology of Spanish anarchism.5 This article contends that the matter of anarchist organization is less simple than it appears, and anarchists were less naïve than historians make them out to be. I argue that a key reason for such deceptive appearance, and for the inherent difficulty of studying anarchist organization, is that anarchism is often an opaque movement, in the sense in which E. P. Thompson calls Luddism "the opaque society," arguing that one reason why its sources are clouded is that workers intended them to be so: "If there had been an underground in these years, by its very nature it would not have left written evidence."6 The same inherent link between deceptiveness of superficial evidence and a movement's nature exists for anarchism. By probing what appears superficially simple and odd, one may discover a more complex and rational underlying reality.

In this quest, the present work is driven by a transposition to the historiographical ground of a methodological principle, known as the "principle of charity," first introduced in the philosophy of language by Neil L. Wilson, and then restated by Willard V. O. Quine, Donald Davidson, and others, under various rubrics. The basic idea is that understanding is based on a presumption of rationality: in interpreting or translating an interlocutor's statements, we choose the interpretation that maximizes the number of true statements, or that avoids absurdities or contradictions. Conversely, the more absurd the beliefs imputed to the interlocutor, the more suspicious we are entitled to be of the interpretation or translation.7

Davidson has extended the principle of charity from language to the interpretation of human behavior in general. The problem, as Davidson puts it, is that behavior can be interpreted only by knowing one's beliefs and desires, which in turn can only be accessed by interpreting one's behavior- specifically one's speech. Thus, Davidson maintains, "we must somehow deliver simultaneously a theory of belief and a theory of meaning," neither of which takes priority. His solution is a "policy of rational accommodation," which "calls on us to fit our own propositions... to the other person's words and attitudes in such a way as to render their speech and other behavior intelligible. This necessarily requires us to see others as much like ourselves in point of overall coherence and correctness." This policy, Davidson argues, is not one of many possible successful policies, but "the only policy available if we want to understand other people."8

In this broader application, the principle of charity has been extended to social sciences, in the context of the so-called "problem of attributions of irrationality."9 Usually, the principle is discussed as a methodological guideline for inferring covert desires and beliefs from the
evidence of overt behavior, taken as a point of departure. In the present article, the principle of charity is unconventionally employed in the opposite direction, that is, as a heuristic guideline to uncover new, supplementary evidence about an agent's behavior, should the available evidence support no satisfactory interpretation. Anarchism represents an interesting and challenging test bed because of the inherent link between unavailability of evidence and opacity. In sum, the question I intend to investigate is whether a charitable approach to an opaque movement may have any bearing on our empirical findings about it.

My case study is the First of May in its first years, from 1890 to 1892. Here, too, recent research, such as Giampietro Berti’s biography of the Italian Errico Malatesta, a key figure of European anarchism in those years, has brought no substantial correction to the usually dismissive analyses of earlier accounts. Several reasons make the First of May a suitable case study. During its initial years it was the object of a fierce debate between socialists and anarchists in Europe. The former advocated mass demonstrations to pressure governments to enact labor legislation; the latter advocated direct action tactics, including open insurrection. This provides an opportunity for comparative study of a legal and public form of collective action as well as an illegal and underground one. Moreover, the repetitive character of the First of May protests allows one to compare several instances of the event. My itinerary through anarchism and the First of May follows Errico Malatesta's moves. In addition to being an influential leader, Malatesta was both a strong advocate of the First of May as an opportunity for anarchist action and a direct protagonist of relevant initiatives. Moreover, following Malatesta's moves adds a geographical dimension to the cross-comparison, since his efforts focused in sequence on different countries. Thus, my analysis follows a chronological-geographical sequence, focusing briefly on France in 1890 and more extensively on Italy in 1891 and Spain in 1892.

France, 1890

Historians often employ the concept of invented tradition to describe the First of May, not in the weak sense of an invented institution that became a tradition, but in the stronger sense of something invented as a tradition. The notion has an uncharitable side toward anarchists. Inventing a tradition within the capitalist context clearly contrasts with anarchist revolutionary goals; thus, the intentionality implicit in that notion can only be attributed to anarchists on pain of inconsistency. The equally uncharitable alternative would be that anarchists did not contribute to the creation of the First of May. Instead, the crystallization of the First of May into a ritualized tradition was neither an invention of its promoters nor a spontaneous germination. It resulted from the interaction between a spontaneous stream of popular forces suddenly come to the surface, and a conscious effort to direct that stream. It was one interpretation of a process open to different outcomes, its alternative being the interpretation of the First of May as an opportunity for a less predictable and controllable escalation of class struggle through direct action.

The latter was Malatesta's interpretation from the outset. His trip to Paris from his London exile for the First of May 1890 signaled his expectations about possible outcomes. In an essay on the First of May, which she interprets as "the High Mass of the working class," Michelle Perrot remarks: "Doing the same thing at the same time: this great principle of religious practice was now, by a stroke of genius, transferred to the labour movement, a new Moses leading the way to a new Promised Land." However, the idea of "doing the same thing at the same time" was
also, for Malatesta, the principle of effective revolutionary practice—or of collective action at large, the general strike being an example. The very characters of the First of May that Perrot regards as ritual elements, especially the contrast between paucity of instructions and grandiose vision, constituted for Malatesta a promising basis for collective action, by making the demonstration amenable to different outcomes. On the one hand, large masses of workers gathered together under an anticapitalist banner in an ideologically charged context; on the other hand, no immediate practical objectives were provided. A great energy was being accumulated, which could be released in different directions.

Malatesta's attitude and expectations in Paris clearly emerge from his article "Les Leçons du 1er Mai," written for La Révolte in the wake of the demonstration, which he regarded as a missed opportunity. One of Malatesta's criticisms concerned the lack of organization. If anarchists felt that the demonstration would or should not be peaceful, they should have got ready to set the masses in revolt, foreseen means of attack and defense, made plans, and distributed tasks. The article also hints at what Malatesta thought anarchists could have done: attract part of the demonstrators to some unguarded high district of Paris, entrench themselves in those popular neighborhoods, erect barricades, and defend themselves. They might have remained in control for only few days, or even hours, but meanwhile expropriation might have started, and the mass might have directly experienced the potential advantages of revolution. Such remarks set the stage for Malatesta's organizational efforts in the next two years.

Italy, 1891

In the aftermath of the First of May 1890, Italy became Malatesta's focus, in a trend of events that culminated with the First of May 1891. The Capolago congress of 4-6 January 1891, where the Partito Socialista-Anarchico- Rivoluzionario was founded, was the key event. The congress placed great emphasis on the upcoming 1 May agitations, approving a resolution to join in the celebration, call workers to a general strike as of 1 May, and call anarchists to carry out suitable propaganda. When 1 May arrived, the most notable incidents occurred in Rome, at the meeting in the piazza Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. The London Times thus described the events:

A meeting of workmen was held to-day in the Piazza Santa Croce. The proceedings passed off quietly, and the speeches delivered by the several leaders had been peaceful, when a workman named Vincenzo Landi mounted the platform, and, after proclaiming himself an Anarchist, called upon the assembly to attack the troops drawn up near the meeting. Then ensued a scene of terrible confusion, the mob pelting the soldiery with stones, and, the cavalry charging the mob, several shots were fired at the troops and many soldiers wounded. Several of the mob were also killed and wounded.

The report represents a widespread perception of the events, as featuring an inflammable crowd ignited by the sudden appearance of an unknown individual coming out of the blue, who thus came to bear much of the responsibility for the events. Such accounts engender an obvious and awkward contrast between the two highlights of Italian anarchism in 1891: on the one hand, the high-sounding formal propositions of the Capolago congress, seemingly a prelude to a countrywide and articulated mobilization effort aimed at 1 May; on the other hand, the
unplanned, impromptu character born by the most notable 1 May occurrence. What is the historian to make of such a contrast?

It soon emerged that things were not exactly as they seemed. It turned out that Venerio Landi—not Vincenzo, as the Times reported—was in fact Galileo Palla, a well-known anarchist militant. Though the discovery dispelled the suspicion of Palla being an agent provocateur, the predominant perception remained that of a spontaneous riot sparked by his impromptu intervention. Anarchist sources tended to support this version, probably in an effort to restrict responsibilities and to emphasize the events' unadulterated popular character. Forty-five years later, the direct witness Aristide Ceccarelli still recalled Palla as "a tall and strong young man known by nobody."16

Most notably, many historians, especially Marxists, have maintained the unplanned character of the Rome events, furnishing the appearances described by the Times with underlying historical analyses, and variously attempting to link the Rome events to the Capolago resolutions. For example, Luciano Cafagna argues that those resolutions revealed insurrectionary intentions for the First of May, but the increasing isolation of the Roman anarchists persuaded them that insurrection plans were nonsensical. Enzo Santarelli argues that congress leaders, such as Cipriani and Malatesta, rejected the insurrectionary idea, but were not able to control the barricadero tendencies within the movement. The contrast between "responsible leadership" and "anarchism" is also argued by Renzo del Carria, for whom anarchist leaders did not want to unleash the revolution "at a fixed date," but were ultimately thwarted in their efforts by the anarchists' inability to lead the Rome workers in revolt. All such interpretations reconcile the Capolago resolutions and the Rome events by including somewhere an attribution of inconsistency to anarchism, overwhelmed by the events: the indecisiveness and change of mind of the Roman anarchists, the impossibility for "thinking anarchists" to tame blind individualism, or the powerlessness of "responsible leaders" before the chronic anarchist incapability to lead workers. In contrast to the attribution of irrationality, our task as charitable historians is to question superficial evidence rather than integrating it in our explanations. We start from the end, by questioning the odd circumstance of a prominent figure such as Palla, who takes the gravest initiative in total isolation, unbeknownst to his comrades.17

In fact, Palla did not come out of nowhere. He left Paris for Italy nearly a month before the Rome demonstration.18 What was he up to during that period? On 12 April he attended in Milan the international congress "for labor rights" at the Canobbiana theater, a large convention in which democratic and socialist political forces and trade unions were represented, along with delegations from France, Germany, and Spain. Pietro Gori and Luigi Galleani spoke for the Italian anarchists. An energetic speech of revolutionary tone was also delivered by the Spanish anarchist representative, Fernandez.19 Another Capolago anarchist, Giovanni Bergamasco from Naples, was also in attendance. Clearly, such events were opportunities for militants to meet inconspicuously and lay out plans. Even in Rome Palla was not a stranger. He was there days before the demonstration, meeting socialists, anarchists, and Cipriani himself, who was to be the main speaker at the upcoming demonstration.20 In brief, the picture of Palla as "a tall and strong young man known by nobody" can hardly be accepted. In fact, some historians, such as Giampietro Berti, have rejected Palla's exclusive responsibilities, identifying a straight line
connecting Capolago to the Rome events, regarded as "a nearly predictable outcome" of a considerable organizational effort. However, this interpretation raises its own questions.

One question concerns the propaganda activities emanating from Capolago. According to Galleani, the congress decided that he and Cipriani would undertake extensive propaganda tours from Piedmont to Sicily. Though little is known about Galleani's tour in Northern Italy, information is available about Cipriani's tour, which had a more official character. The tour lasted approximately six weeks, half in Sicily and half between Naples and Rome, starting in March and ending on 1 May with the piazza Santa Croce meeting. Throughout the tour, as well as in private correspondence, Cipriani's preoccupation was not the promotion of insurrectionary movements, but their prevention. Upon arrival in Rome, Cipriani spoke in similar terms to the local anarchists, some of which insisted instead on direct action. Finally, 1 May arrived, and Cipriani recommended caution again to the crowd in the square: "I say to you painfully: today we are not ready to fight, for if you dare to move you will be massacred . . ." The questor of Rome regarded Cipriani's speech as "very violent" and "inciting to revolt," and his recommendations as "a subterfuge to avoid a greater criminal liability." However, unless one accepts this Machiavellian theory, the conjecture that his tour was part of insurrectionary plans was consistently contradicted by his attitude.

Another question concerns Malatesta's role, or lack thereof. Unlike Palla, Malatesta is conspicuous for his absence in the events' accounts. Yet, if Palla had shared plans with anyone at all, this would have been Malatesta. Considering Malatesta's militant outlook on the First of May, lack of contact between the two would seem odd. Aside from Palla, Malatesta's activity around 1 May looks incongruous. According to an account of the Italian authorities, unproblematically taken at face value by historians, he left London in mid-April and spent time in France, to reach Italy only on 4 May. Yet Malatesta had thus spelled out his viewpoint in a letter to his close friend Francesco Saverio Merlino of February 1891: ". . . if one wants to undertake serious organization and get anything accomplished, one must go to Italy; now, I would go myself as soon as I freed myself from the jobs I have in hand, that is around the beginning of April . . ." In the light of this, it would be strange if Malatesta had left London only to keep away from Italy until after 1 May. According to the London Metropolitan Police, Malatesta stuck to his plans instead, as he was reported to have left in mid-April "en route for Italy, and supposedly for Rome, for the purpose of fomenting disturbances on the 1st of May." This is confirmed by Malatesta's biographers. Fabbri plainly stated, "Malatesta had clandestinely arrived in Italy in April, and remained there for some time after the events." Likewise, Nettlau wrote, "Malatesta went on a clandestine trip to Italy, before and after that First of May 1891-between April and the beginning of June." A clue to Malatesta's whereabouts in those days comes unexpectedly from an interview by the historian Paul Avrich with a Spanish anarchist immigrant in the United States, eighty years later. Speaking about his old friend Pedro Esteve, Marcelino García noted incidentally, "In 1891 he met Errico Malatesta at a convention in Milan . . ." Given the timeline of Malatesta's moves in that year, the only candidate convention in Milan is the meeting for labor rights of 12 April 1891. Of course, an indirect testimony after such a long time demands caution. Yet an 1891 report by the Italian Consul in Barcelona reveals that Fernandez, the fiery Spaniard who spoke at that
convention, was none other than Pedro Esteve. Malatesta's presence in Milan as early as 12 April 1891 would leave a three-week period completely unaccounted for, during which he could have carried out activity in Italy—a circumstance of great consequence in reconstructing the events leading to 1 May. What is more, Luigi Fabbri claims that on 1 May, Malatesta was either in Rome or in Florence, the two cities where the most serious incidents occurred. Either way, Malatesta would have been at the heart of the agitations.27

One is led to hypothesize that Malatesta may have had a role in Palla's preparations. Further investigation on the activity of Malatesta and Merlino corroborates the hypothesis. The two had started insurrectionary preparation well before Capolago. In August 1890 Merlino undertook an extensive and successful tour in Sicily, aiming to organize and prepare groups for a possible armed insurrection. The questor of Rome reported about insurrectionary plans involving the Roman anarchists, and including a shipment of Sicily-bound weapons to Malta, with Malatesta's help in London. From Sicily, Merlino eventually returned to the continent, with Capolago as final destination.28

Insurrectionary preparation did not stop there. Besides Galleani's and Cipriani's tours, a third tour was planned during the Capolago congress, to be undertaken in Calabria by the Roman delegate Ettore Gnocchetti, to extend the work initiated in Sicily by Merlino. Though eventually the tour was aborted, it sheds light on plans and connections. It should be remarked that the letters of credentials, prepared by Merlino for Gnocchetti and addressed to Calabrian militants, make no mention of a mandate from the congress. All letters were dated 6 January 1891, thus they were indeed written at the time of the congress. The decision to undertake the tour was likely taken there, too, though there is no evidence that it emanated from the congress, either.29

In fact, the question about what was actually decided at the Capolago congress is crucial, if one is to establish a link between those decisions and the events of 1 May. Although Berti claims that the congress's resolution "confirmed the intention to give an insurrectional character" to the demonstrations, one cannot find explicit signs of that in the resolution's wording, which called for a general strike and propaganda activity. Of course, one cannot expect an explicit call for insurrection in official party resolutions; and the resolution had no doubt a revolutionary tone. Still, one should distinguish between generic revolutionary appeals and specific insurrectionary calls, on pain of reading a call for insurrection in every public statement issued by a revolutionary party—as the Italian authorities did in interpreting Cipriani's speeches. The issue of public versus secret resolutions is crucial in discussing a movement's opacity, and one should look beyond the congress's public documents for evidence. In fact, a report from Capolago published in Freedom tellingly revealed that, in addition to the congress's resolutions, "agreements of a practical nature were ratified that are not meant for publication"; and Fabbri explicitly states that "secret agreements were made" to the effect of giving an insurrectional character to the 1 May demonstrations. Was Gnocchetti's tour part of such agreements? This would be consistent with the conjecture that his mandate did not proceed from the congress. In turn, the continuity of his tour with Merlino's, and the project's extraneousness to the congress, suggest a different causal chain for the 1 May events, predating the Capolago congress and proceeding from the segment of the anarchist movement gathered around Malatesta and Merlino.30
The fact that the Calabrian tour was entrusted to the Roman congress delegate leads us to discuss the role played by the Roman anarchists. They had been in contact with Merlino and Malatesta since at least August 1890. After Capolago they immediately started building the new party's local organizations. In addition, they were being entrusted by the congress to publish the prospective party organ, La Questione Sociale. Their central national role is corroborated by the wide geographical scope of a list of forty-three correspondents of the Roman Anarchist-Socialist Federation seized by the police. Contacts with Malatesta are attested throughout the months after Capolago. Finally, a Roman anarchist, Cesare Bedogni, was also present at the Canobbiana theater meeting of 12 April. In brief, unity of intents, cooperation, and a dense web of contacts existed among Malatesta, Merlino, and the Roman anarchists.

Our quest for insurrectionary plans through the smoke screen of anarchist opacity has taken us from Palla to Malatesta and Merlino, and from these to the Roman anarchists. To close the circle, the role of the Roman anarchists in the riots remains to be analyzed. In contrast to Cafagna's thesis that they had given up insurrectionary plans by the time 1 May arrived, evidence speaks to a different frame of mind: for example, they called on workers to register at anarchist headquarters for the purpose of organizing and regimenting all forces for 1 May. Here, enrolled people were asked whether they had served in the army and in what corps. Moreover, in their conversations with Cipriani in Rome, Pietro Calcagno and other Roman anarchists manifested no change of mind and still insisted on their call for action.

In his report on the demonstration, the police officer-in-chief reported that the anarchists "were greeted with prolonged applause, after they almost militarily wedged themselves into the thick crowd of the other associations to take possession of the area next to the speakers' platform, in order to be ready for any immediate maneuver." When the alleged Venerio Landi appeared on the platform, he turned to the crowd and said: "It is useless to keep wasting time with chatter. Revolutions were always made without discussions and meetings. Deeds are what it takes. It all comes to seizing the moment, and this can be tomorrow, today, or when you like." Then, "at once hurling himself from the platform amidst the bystanders, he gave the signal of revolt by example." It was utter confusion. "The officer-in-chief, realizing that the anarchists had surrounded the officers that stood closest to the platform to begin the fight, and thus persuaded that any delay could be fatal, gave order for the bugle blasts . . ." The meeting was over and the fight had started and continued for several hours, including attempts to erect barricades, an assault to a prison during which a demonstrator was killed, and several attempts by groups of demonstrators to penetrate in the most central city districts. The police report reveals the tactical side of the anarchist presence in the square, as the audience that Palla addressed most immediately and that started the fight was not an angry mob, but rather a disciplined contingent of anarchist militants who had intentionally taken the position they occupied. Various tactical aspects of the ensuing action—no matter how successful—were reminiscent of what Malatesta had retrospectively advocated for the 1890 Paris demonstration. In sum, a different reality from the spontaneous riot reported by the Times emerges here.

Let us now return to the conjectural link between the Rome demonstration and the Capolago congress. Our rejection of explanations based on inconsistency forces us to explore the one conjecture generally discarded as counterintuitive: that the disturbances were planned, but the
plans were not made by the Capolago congress. In fact, in this scenario the apparent contradiction in the evidence disappears: if we admit that plans may have been made at Capolago, but not by the congress, then Fabbri's claim about secret plans can be reconciled with Cipriani's lack of support to any such plans. The key to resolving contradictions in the patent evidence lies in opaque circumstances.

Although our hypothesis may seem awkward, the opposite is true. A significant congress component was represented by the Romagna socialist associations led by Germanico Piselli, the editor of the Forlì newspaper La Rivendicazione. Their slogan was "neither unreasonably intransigent, nor absolutely legalitarian," and they set themselves the task of bridging the gap between anarchists and revolutionary socialists who participated in elections. Considering their self-attributed role, it is questionable whether they would have subscribed to any insurrectionary plans. In fact, their position had already been announced in La Rivendicazione on the eve of the congress. The article claimed that "the congress can only provide directions for the moment of the action, and unify its impulse and forces, but it cannot set the date and time of the revenge by improvident and rash arrangements." Weeks ahead of the First of May, they eloquently called for demonstrations "disregarding stupid provocations that overzealous or ignorant government agents may try to throw amidst peaceful demonstrations."

The debate on the First of May in the revolutionary press was asymmetrical. Whereas the advocates of peaceful demonstrations could openly express their viewpoint, the supporters of insurrectionary initiatives could not afford the same candor. Hence, one would find nowhere open responses to articles such as quoted above. Still, the next issue of La Rivendicazione contained a short article by Merlino celebrating the Paris Commune, and obliquely but unmistakably contrasting the above perspective: "neither the people nor the Bourgeoisie, at that time, was aware of the importance of the struggle. It was only afterwards . . . that it was really felt that something exceptionally important had happened in the world . . ." Merlino went on to list the reasons why the Paris Commune did not succeed. Significantly, the final item in the list was that "it did not succeed because 1871 is not 1891." The message was clear: one did not know for sure when the time was ripe for a revolution; still, 1891 offered more favorable conditions than 1871. The two arguments converged in rejecting the idea that 1891 was unripe for a successful insurrectionary movement: instead, a new Paris Commune might indeed be successful.

Thus, patent contradictions between words and deeds can be accounted for as disagreements asymmetrically expressed, through overt propaganda on one side and covert activism on the other. Support for this interpretation comes from Max Nettlau, who emphasized that lack of support for Malatesta's insurrectionary project was a relevant factor in 1891, though few historians seem to have heeded his remarks. Nettlau identifies a generational gap at the root of the contrast between Malatesta's optimism about the possibility to overthrow the state and the pessimism of younger generations. In a selffulfilling process, the latter's criticism of insurrectionary projects engendered failures, used in turn as argument against Malatesta's alleged chimeras. For Nettlau, "this was the intimate tragedy of his efforts," demonstrated both in the Capolago congress and in the preparations and plans for the First of May 1891, and possibly determined, in Nettlau's opinion, by both the degeneration of revolutionary socialists and the anarchist lack of confidence in collective action and organization.
This contrast is further illustrated by the debate in the revolutionary press after the Rome events. After the dust had settled, both sides could express their viewpoints more openly. La Rivendicazione contrasted the nearly unanimous agreement on a peaceful demonstration with Palla's act, likened to that of a cowardly deus ex machina. Malatesta responded to defend Palla as a person, while providing a critical assessment of his initiative. He conceded that the opportuneness of Palla's deed could be criticized, but his analysis quickly turned into a strong indictment of the inertia of Palla's detractors, who "incessantly talk of revolution," but "take little or no action." Malatesta concluded by wishing that "the events of Rome and Florence be a lesson," and reiterated his call for action: "The time is right for us: if we are not able to act and win, it is our fault."40

Spain, 1892

Revolutionary agitation knew no interruption. As soon as the series of events connected to the First of May 1891 came to a conclusion, Malatesta directed his planning and organizing to the First of May of the next year, turning his attention to Spain. If the Italian movement was Malatesta's primary concern, Spanish anarchism was where he felt the greatest affinity. Malatesta's relationship with the Spaniards dated back to 1872, at the time of the First International. The key concepts of the International—collective action, organization, and reliance on the workers' movement—remained the essence of that affinity. In October 1891, Malatesta expressed his optimism and hopes about Spain at a London anarchist conference, holding up Spain as an example of effective anarchist agitation among workers, and claiming "that anarchists were the life and soul of the labour movement in Spain."41 On 8 November, Malatesta was in Barcelona, to embark with Pedro Esteve on an extensive propaganda tour, promoted by the anarchist newspaper El Productor. The tour was the first of two chains of events that unfolded in Spain between November 1891 and January 1892. The second was the uprising that occurred in the Andalusian town of Jerez on 8 January 1892. As in the case of the Capolago congress and the Rome riots in Italy, historians have wondered about the respective internal connections in the two chains of events and about Malatesta's role in each insurrectionary episode. Although Malatesta was a protagonist of both the Capolago congress and the propaganda tour in Spain, I will argue that he stood in opposite relationships to the two subsequent episodes, being involved in the Rome riots but extraneous to the Jerez uprising. However, beyond this asymmetry, there is a deeper similarity between the events of Italy and Spain. Through different circumstances in different countries, the two cases illustrate the same contrast between the appearance of anarchism, made of sensational but ephemeral outbursts of spontaneous revolt, and its reality, made of opaque but sustained and coherent organization and planning.

To probe the appearances, it is first necessary to investigate the goal of Esteve and Malatesta's itinerant project. After a month spent touring in Catalonia, the "propaganda committee" comprising the two anarchists set out on a countrywide tour scheduled to touch Saragossa, Bilbao, Valladolid, Madrid, Cordoba, Granada, Malaga, Cadiz, Cartagena, Alicante, Alcoy, Valencia, and possibly Corunna. For Max Nettlau, "that propaganda tour was undoubtedly motivated by the objective of uniting anarchists toward some activity of a general character starting from 1 May 1892."42 Nettlau's claim is confirmed by Malatesta himself, who, in recalling the events of Spain in a letter to Nettlau of 1929, mentioned "the plans we had for 1
May 1893 [sic]."43 We get a sense of the project's far-reaching scope by considering its itinerary. The portion of the tour that actually took place covered in approximately a month only the first four of the planned main centers, Saragossa, Bilbao, Valladolid, and Madrid. If one considers that eight more main centers were scheduled, one can appreciate the proportions of the propaganda drive being undertaken. What could have been the "activity of a general character" to which Nettlau refers? A letter that, according to Italian governmental sources, Malatesta sent to comrades in Italy before leaving Spain, made explicit reference to insurrectionary activity, stating "that the uprising of the Jerez anarchists was too hasty and therefore it could not achieve the results expected by the party; that the agitation should have taken place later, in six Spanish provinces simultaneously; that, however, the revolution is simply postponed . . ."44

Insurrectionary objectives were not a necessary corollary of anarchist tactics. A look at the tactics adopted by the Spanish anarchists for May Day of the two previous years shows that their ultimate revolutionary goal neither implied a commitment to violence nor a disregard for the palliative improvement of working conditions. Rather, they were committed to direct action means, within which there was room for different tactics. Looking at May Day 1892 in this context points to discontinuities as well as continuities with earlier tactics. Insurrectionary objectives were not simply associated with every First of May, but were the result of tactical considerations based on an assessment of changing conditions. If Spanish anarchists specifically made insurrectionary plans for the First of May 1892, Malatesta's trip at that juncture acquires a sharper contour in the light of those plans.

In the month before 1 May 1890, El Productor enthusiastically focused its propaganda on the eight-hour issue. Indeed, this was "an episode of the war, but not the object of the war." However, the achievement of the final objective was presently out of the question. No mention of insurrectionary activity was made, but great emphasis was placed on direct action in the form of a general strike. The workers were to address not the state, but the bourgeoisie directly, and "demand the eight-hour day, and if this is refused to us, we refuse in turn to work."45 Workers' mobilization on May Day was extensive, with major general strikes in Catalonia and elsewhere. In Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, the degree of participation and combativeness displayed by the workers immediately made May Day a crucial date of anticapitalist struggle.46

The following year was spent organizing and preparing the general strike for May Day 1891. Numerous meetings were held, workers' societies were organized, and new federations among workers' societies were established. A countrywide trade union congress held in Madrid in March 1891 unanimously confirmed its commitment to the eight-hour struggle for May Day 1891. Though important strikes occurred in many cities, the days before and after May Day were most notably marked by government repression.47 The following months provided the opportunity to reassess the entire issue of May Day. In the article "El Movimiento de Mayo," a crucial question was posed: "What shall we do the next May Day?" The dilemma: "two paths are presently available . . . one is to persevere in the pursuit of the eight hour; the other, which recently emerged with great seriousness, is the threat of going bankrupt that hangs over several European States." The forthcoming events would show which path to follow. In the former case, the general strike would be the only available means. In the latter case, "it will come to attempting plainly and simply the dissolution of the States, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, and the return of the universal wealth to the proletariat."48
Evidence that the eventual answer was in the insurrectionary direction comes from an analysis of the speeches held during the propaganda tour. These represent an insightful source, because they provide a glimpse of themes that could hardly be openly discussed in the press. The eight-hour workday was mentioned only occasionally and marginally. Likewise, only a couple of references to May Day can be found. The theme that recurred most frequently in Pedro Esteve's speeches was the need for organization. As for Malatesta, the most outstanding theme was insurrection. At a Barcelona meeting of 11 November, he claimed that "when the bourgeoisie have bayonets, rifles, and many other powerful means to gun us down, it cannot be denied that the same means of defense cannot be disregarded by revolutionaries. The struggle of ideas is sufficient when we are not physically attacked, but when we are knocked down, it is only natural to defend ourselves."

Malatesta made equally explicit references in other meetings, such as those in Manresa, Sabadell, Sallent, Palafrugell, and Madrid. Such references were not generic elements of the standard anarchist repertoire, nor were they dropped casually. In contrast to other standard themes—such as antirepublicanism, antiparlamentarianism, the futility of reforms, and social revolution, which were used by all speakers—insurrection and expropriation were almost exclusively limited to the speeches of Malatesta, who tended to concentrate them in specific places, especially Catalonia. In brief, references to insurrection were governed by careful planning. For the charitable historian, it is reasonable to assume that Malatesta's speech planning was driven by a purpose; that such purpose was shared by the Spanish anarchists who entrusted him with the responsibility of a propaganda tour on their behalf; and that the initiative was part of broader plans laid out in the previous months. In sum, the changed attitude of Spanish anarchists toward the objective of the eight-hour day, the references to an insurrectionary solution in their press, and the undertaking of a far-reaching propaganda tour in which the insurrectionary theme was prominent, all indicate that an insurrectionary project was in the wings.

The question about the relationship between the tour and its objectives can also be reversed: how was a speaking tour instrumental to the objective of an understanding for insurrectionary activity? Despite their inconspicuous characterization as "propaganda" tours, such tours often had organizational objectives. As Luigi Galleani recalled about the speaking tours entrusted to him and Cipriani at Capolago, their task was "to put out feelers, to test who the best comrades were as to seriousness and activism, to join them in a strong chain, providing a web to be put to good use at the first opportunity." A decentralized network model of organization was at work. It was less conspicuous than centralized ones regarding coordination for insurrectionary objectives. For the same reasons, it was also historiographically more opaque. A striking contrast existed between the scale and ambitions of the Esteve-Malatesta tour and its lack of prominence in the anarchist press, confined as it was to the small print of short reports in internal pages. Moreover, such reports were obviously limited to the public part of the tour. However, similar to the Capolago congress, private understandings were possibly even more important than public statements, especially when insurrectionary projects were at stake.

In this respect, the Esteve-Malatesta tour really provided the opportunity to cast an organizational web that covered the entire Spanish territory. The tour's scope can be appreciated from its itinerary, shown in Figure 1, which also includes the cancelled stops. During the tour, Malatesta had contacts with chief representatives of Spanish anarchism, such as José Llunas,
Teresa Claramunt, José López Montenegro, Fernando Tárrida del Mármol, Adrián del Valle in Barcelona, and Vicente García in Bilbao. Besides establishing or strengthening contacts with existing groups and individuals, new nodes in the network were created. Reports mention the formation of various new anarchist groups or workers' associations after the visits by Esteve and Malatesta.51

Unsurprisingly, the tour worried the Spanish government. A significant episode occurred in Valladolid on 26 December. Esteve and Malatesta were received in the premises of the local anarchist federation and given accommodation in its caretaker's apartment. Soon the police surrounded the premises, barring access to anyone until the following day. The two guests were taken to the civil governor, but were soon released. However, the caretaker was charged for hosting a meeting aimed at conspiring against the government, though he was eventually acquitted.52 The episode points to an underground sphere of activity that occurred in parallel with public meetings. Most importantly, it provides evidence of police preoccupations with the tour activities. In fact, the tour was interrupted shortly thereafter, in the wake of the Jerez uprising of 8 January 1892, to which we now turn to analyze its characteristics, Malatesta's alleged role in it, and its impact on the propaganda tour.

The overall scenario can be summarized as follows. Between November 1891 and January 1892, two chains of events occurred in Spanish anarchism: on the one hand, a superficially quiet but articulated and far-reaching organizational drive; on the other hand, a clamorous but isolated and short-sighted uprising. There is evidence that the authorities let the latter initiative happen and then blew the event out of all proportion, attributing to it the widest possible implications. One of the consequences was that the former initiative was suppressed as quietly as it was unfolding. The Jerez uprising went down in history as the anarchist highlight of this period, but the propaganda tour was relegated to a minor episode of biographical interest. The significance of the story is that the historiographical agenda of anarchism may end up being dictated not so much by the anarchists as by their enemies. In contrast, what is relevant to the history of anarchism may not necessarily be under the light of the street lamp, but lie instead somewhere in the surrounding darkness, as the historiographical debate about the rationality of the Jerez anarchists well illustrates.

George Woodcock characterizes the Jerez uprising as a paradigmatic example of anarchist oddity. He describes it as part of "a sudden upsurge of insurrection, bomb throwings, and assassinations" that characterized Spain as well as France. On this occasion, the country districts "sprang to life again" in one of those "periodical surges of enthusiasm" that were "characteristic of Andalusian anarchism": "Four thousands peasants, armed with scythes and shouting 'Long Live Anarchy!' marched into Jerez and killed a few unpopular shopkeepers. After a night of sporadic fighting between the insurgents and the Civil Guard, a force of cavalry arrived and the rebellion was quickly crushed." The result was that "four of the peasant leaders were executed and many others were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment." Woodcock packs in a few lines the whole inventory of anarchist irrationalism: spontaneity, cyclicity, chaos, futility of means, senseless violence, lack of plans or goals, and lack of impact, all of these together constituting the regional "character" of Andalusian anarchism.53
E. J. Hobsbawm's millenarian interpretation, like Woodcock's account, emphasizes the spontaneity and ultimately the irrationality of the Jerez anarchists, characterized by an abysmal inadequacy of means to ends. Their revolutionary belief did not turn into an effort to understand conditions, to organize workers, and to plan agitations, but rather into a simple, spontaneous urge to rebel, with no knowledge of how the great change would come about. Hobsbawm's analysis of the Jerez uprising extends to the history of Andalusian anarchism, Spanish anarchism, and ultimately, anarchism in general. In contrast, Temma Kaplan emphasizes the rationality of the Andalusian anarchists, their high level of organization, tactical sophistication, and effectiveness. Kaplan's account has been criticized in turn by Antonio López Estudillo, for whom "the questionable and excessively imaginative work of Temma Kaplan cannot be used as a reference, as it is riddled with epic assertions devoid of any foundation." For López Estudillo the uprising arose in the context of contrasts between two currents of Spanish anarchism, one engaged in unionism and the other comprising affinity groups advocating the urgency of revolutionary action.54

Fresh insight into the uprising can be gained by analyzing it in the broader context of Spanish anarchism, as López Estudillo does, especially by contrasting it with the ongoing organizational drive represented by the propaganda tour. In this context, the most prominent characteristic of the Jerez uprising was its isolation. The accounts of anarchist commentators such as Ricardo Mella, Fortunato Serantoni, and Pedro Vallina almost unanimously emphasize its narrowness.55 The immediate reaction of anarchist newspapers such as El Productor and La Anarquía of Madrid reveals a complete lack of any information, which points to the insurgents' isolation. El Corsario of Corunna even cast doubts on the conduct of the authorities, not in terms of their repressiveness, but of their permissiveness, given that the authorities had preventively made sixty arrests and knew about the insurrectional preparations, but did nothing to prevent the uprising. Pedro Vallina turned such doubts into explicit accusations, identifying Félix Grávalo Bonilla, an agitator who appeared in Jerez few months before the uprising, as an agent provocateur.56

There is a certain narrowness to the historians' debate about the millenarianism of the Jerez insurgents, which comes from neglecting a larger context. Hobsbawm takes the uprising for what it appeared to be, a spontaneous and isolated rebellion, but he arbitrarily attributes such characteristics to anarchism in general. His generalization is unwarranted, especially considering that the Jerez uprising occurred at the same time as a wider initiative that conflicted with the former precisely on those issues of spontaneity and lack of organization that Hobsbawm considers anarchism's universal features. Kaplan's emphasis on rationality, organization, and planning is equally problematic and incongruous in the light of the Jerez insurgents' isolation and lack of cooperation, if not open conflict, with a broader organizational effort simultaneously occurring across Spain. In her effort to refute Hobsbawm and to show the existence of a wide organizational network, Kaplan turns to an inflated account, just as the authorities of the time had done. Both Hobsbawm and Kaplan unquestioningly take the Jerez uprising to represent exhaustively what anarchists were up to in that area at that time, and then proceed to assess the adequacy of anarchism to the given circumstances, with opposite conclusions. Ultimately, despite their diametrical divergence, the respective shortcomings have a common source, which is precisely their focus on Jerez. Neither scholar takes into account that alternative views and different options were available within anarchism.
The same narrowness affects the debate about whether Malatesta was involved in the Jerez uprising. Simply because Malatesta was in Spain at that time, the question of his role in the uprising has naturally arisen. Such discussions usually neglect to consider Malatesta's own plans and those of the editors of El Productor who brought him to Spain. Malatesta's link with the Jerez uprising is simply hypothesized on the basis of his presence in the country. However, recollections rendered by Pedro Esteve many years later vouch that no such involvement existed. The night of the uprising Malatesta was in Madrid, taking part in a public meeting with Esteve and others. Also, news of the Jerez uprising was obviously unexpected by Malatesta.

Moreover, Malatesta deemed the uprising untimely. As a matter of fact, not only was the uprising itself unsuccessful, but it also spoiled Esteve's and Malatesta's plans. If Malatesta had had contacts with the insurgents, most likely he would have advised them to change their course of action. Conversely, if the uprising had had insurrectionary objectives, coordination with Esteve and Malatesta would have been the most obvious course of action, given the commonality of objectives. In fact, Fermín Salvochea advised a group of Jerez anarchists to wait for Malatesta's imminent arrival in Andalusia, in view of concerted action. Thus, in all likelihood Malatesta had no acquaintance with the uprising being hatched in Jerez, even though the insurgents were acquainted with Esteve and Malatesta's project. If any relation can be posited at all, it would seem to be one of conflict rather than coordination. Accordingly, a possible interpretation would be along the lines suggested by López Estudillo: a tactical conflict between affinity groups and societarismo (unionism). Furthermore, agent provocateurs may have had a role. If police manipulation occurred, one could reasonably conjecture that undermining the tour's organizational drive may have been an objective.

In sum, standard accounts of the events in Spain involving Malatesta have been fraught with the historians' mental laziness, as in the case of Italy. The superficial and sensational appearance of Spanish anarchism has been unquestioningly put in the foreground, and the handy view of anarchism as an ideological monolith has left no room for distinctions and multiple narratives. As a result, what has remained in the background, such as Malatesta's presence, has received consideration only to the extent that it fitted into that simplified picture, rather than on its own terms. A more complex picture is also more rational. It presents anarchist insurrectionism not as an aimless and spontaneous outburst of rebellion, but as a conscious project based on the assessment of previous First of May experiences, on a change of tactical direction, and on plans carried out through sustained activity. Divisions, lack of coordination, and possibly police provocation undermined the project. Nevertheless, lack of effectiveness does not diminish the project's rationality. Its opacity, which was the rational prerequisite of its success, determined its erasure from the history of Spanish anarchism, the center stage being taken by a local and isolated revolt, usually interpreted in the most irrational terms.

Conclusions

The events of Italy in 1891 and Spain in 1892 reveal a contrast between the appearance and reality of anarchism. The appearance conforms to a stereotypical image made of spontaneity, lack of organization, and futility, as the Rome disturbances of 1891 and the Jerez uprising of 1892 exemplify. Moreover, a general appearance of oddity and inconsistency is associated with the way public events unfold in the anarchist movement. In Italy, in January 1891, a congress
constituted a countrywide anarchist federation focused on First of May agitations and advocating general strikes; a foremost figure like Amilcare Cipriani was entrusted by the newly formed federation to cross the country in a speaking tour, in which he recommended restraint; and spontaneous riots broke out in the very city where Cipriani spoke on the First of May. In Spain, between November 1891 and January 1892, an extensive speaking tour was undertaken by a well-known foreign militant with the support of Spanish anarchist organizations, at a time when no immediate justification for the tour was in sight; and a sudden, unorganized, and ephemeral uprising occurred elsewhere in the country at the same time. Historians' attempts at providing unified explanations by linking the events as they superficially appear tend to run into problems, or to uncharitably revert to the explanatory shortcut of irrationalism.

Reality was different. To begin with, and with respect to the anarchist attitude to the First of May, the following should be noted: (1) anarchists like Malatesta and his Spanish comrades placed great emphasis on the potential of the First of May to escalate anticapitalist class struggle; (2) as Malatesta's remarks in 1890 show, after the First of May debut in Paris, equal emphasis was placed by them on the need for preparation and organization; and (3) although anarchists had revolutionary goals and advocated direct action, they were not prone simply to staging violent demonstrations; instead, a range of tactical options was available to them, depending on their strength and the circumstances. As the history of the First of May in Spain shows, in 1890-91, the Spanish anarchist movement was focusing on the eight-hour struggle and the general strike. It was not until after the First of May 1891 that the insurrectionary option seems to have been given consideration. Even in terms of openly illegal tactics, such as expropriation and armed resistance, there were different options. In particular, due emphasis should be placed on the difference between initiatives that Malatesta would have welcomed in Paris—which were more important for their propaganda value than for their immediate practical effect—and insurrectionary plans aimed at the overthrow of governments.

Indeed, by scratching the surface, a different reality begins to loom in which preparation and organization were not only preached from the columns of the anarchist newspapers, but were actually carried out from one First of May to the next, almost without interruption and across national borders. Shortly after the First of May 1890, Francesco Saverio Merlino left Paris to undertake propaganda and organization work in Sicily. A web of connections and activities linked that initiative to the First of May 1891 in Rome, involving Merlino in Sicily, Malatesta in London, Galileo Palla in Paris, the anarchist federation in Rome, anarchist groups in Naples, all of the above in Capolago in January 1891, and many of them in Milan in April. Later that year, shortly after Malatesta's release from prison in Switzerland pursuant to the May 1891 events in Italy, agreements were made with the Spanish comrades for Malatesta's long propaganda tour starting in November 1891, aimed at organizing the anarchist ranks in view of agitations for the First of May 1892.

However, the necessarily underground character of such an organization makes it disappear from historical accounts. Italy in 1891 and Spain in 1892 illustrate the same phenomenon in two different ways. In Italy the stream of underground agitations for 1 May appeared as the spontaneous commotion of an inflammable crowd, aroused by the impromptu speech of an unknown and quick-tempered speaker. In Spain an articulate and far-reaching organization effort is hardly mentioned in accounts of Spanish anarchism, the historical stage being stolen, as it
were, by yet another spontaneous commotion of an inflammable crowd. Thus that effort becomes confined to a few lines in Malatesta's biographies, and historians are left to debate about Malatesta's role in the uprising that, intentionally or unintentionally, thwarted the very project that brought him to Spain.

However, the invisibility of organization efforts was not casual. As E. P. Thompson argued for the Luddites, there is an intentional side to it. This argument takes us to the heart of anarchist opacity: the invisibility of those efforts was the very precondition of their possibility and of their success, and the counterpart of the invisibility of organization efforts was the apparent spontaneity of popular agitations. One could argue that, to some extent, the degree to which popular agitations and insurrectionary attempts seemed spontaneous was a measure of the success of the underlying organizational work. Obviously, one cannot assume that behind any seemingly spontaneous mob lay anarchist organization. But where such work had taken place, the image of a spontaneous mob was an indicator of its effectiveness. That an agitation appeared to be carried out by a mob speaks to the popular participation in that agitation; and that the agitation seemed spontaneous speaks to the ability of anarchist agitators to work underground.

Neglecting anarchist opacity and limiting one's scope of analysis to what rises to the surface, attempting simply to connect public events such as the Capolago congress and the Rome agitations in Italy, or Malatesta's propaganda tour and the Jerez uprising in Spain is likely to provide distorted interpretations. Somehow, within that scope anarchism is bound to look like an odd movement. Correcting this view is not simply a matter of providing sympathetic interpretations of the available evidence about anarchism. Paradoxically, interpretations of this kind tend to endorse the official versions of agitations, given that authorities were inclined to regard—and sometimes obsessed with regarding—anarchist agitations as the outcome of preordained, highly organized, and far-reaching conspiracies. Berti's interpretations of the 1891 events in Italy and Kaplan's interpretation of the 1892 events in Spain may be considered cases in point. The issue with opacity is not so much to provide a charitable interpretation of available evidence, but rather to question available evidence and to probe beneath the surface, in order to capture complexity and rationality that are concealed by simple and odd appearances. As mentioned in the introduction, rationality thus becomes a heuristic principle.

One cannot claim opacity to be unique to anarchism, and certainly other examples of opaque, subversive movements, such as Luddism, can be found. However, anarchism is certainly one movement for which the "problem of irrationality" is particularly acute, and therefore the need for methodological revision is most urgent. In addition, the broader applicability of similar considerations to other movements simply makes the points raised here stronger and more general.

Part of the necessary methodological revision consists in rejecting any simplistic view of anarchist tactics. In pointing out internal divisions and tactical divergences within the anarchist movement, the events of Italy and Spain in 1891-92 reveal a range of alternative tactical options. Obviously, such divisions were a weakening factor and contributed to the ineffectiveness of anarchist action. Yet acknowledging the ineffectiveness of anarchist initiatives does not imply their irrationality. A failed insurrection is a failed insurrection. In hindsight, that the anarchist means were inadequate is fact. However, neglecting the distinction between ineffectiveness and
irrationality has the unsavory implication that rationality will always be on the side of the majority, the strongest, and ultimately the winner. Moreover, there is a significant difference between ascribing ineffectiveness to inherent inconsistency between means and ends and ascribing it to overpowering circumstance. The latter is contingent and mutable, whereas the former is necessary and immutable. By conflating ineffectiveness and irrationality, and by inferring the necessary from the contingent, the historian makes the unjustified step out of the past into the future, which is still unwritten, and therefore is not the historian's department.

The key methodological move advocated in the present article is the adoption of a principle of charity. I hope to have shown the fruitfulness of such a move through its practical application to a concrete example. In a nutshell, the resulting lesson is that anarchism, as any other movement, must be taken seriously if good history is to be written; condescension must be set aside, as E. P. Thompson argued for the English workers of two centuries ago; and a little Copernican revolution has to happen: whenever the attribution of irrationality occurs, the observer, not the actor, must be the first to carry its uneasy burden.

**Footnote**

**NOTES**


11. Luigi Fabbri, La vida de Malatesta (Barcelona: Guilda de Amigos del Libro, 1936), 127.


20. Report by the questor of Rome to the public prosecutor, 14 May 1891, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione affari
generali e riservati, Archivio generale, Categorie annuali, 1879-1903, b. 2, fs. "1 Maggio 1891."(Cited hereafter as ACS, DGPS.)


22. "É morto Cipriani," Cronaca Sovversiva (Lynn, MA) 16, no. 16 (20 April 1918).


24. Cafagna, "Anarchismo e socialismo," 768; report by the questor of Rome to the public prosecutor, 14 May 1891, ACS, DGPS.


33. Questor of Rome to the public prosecutor, 14 May 1891, ACS, DGPS.


35. Report by the questor of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, 6 May 1891, ACS, DGPS.
36. Questor of Rome to the public prosecutor, 14 May 1891, ACS, DGPS.

37. N. Sandri, "Il congresso socialista" and "La Festa del Lavoro," La Rivendicazione (Forlì) 6, nos. 1 and 13 (3 January and 4 April 1891).


40. N. Sandri, "I fatti di Roma," La Rivendicazione (Forlì) 6, no. 18 (9 May 1891); Errico Malatesta, "Galileo Palla ed i fatti di Roma," La Rivendicazione (Forlì) 6, no. 20 (23 May 1891).


43. Malatesta to Max Nettlau, 12 January 1929, Max Nettlau Papers, file no. 197, International Institute of Social History. The indication of year 1893 can undoubtedly be considered Malatesta's typo, as the same mistake is found elsewhere in Malatesta's recollections of the Spanish tour.


45. "La jornada de ocho horas," El Productor (Barcelona) 4, no. 192 (4 April 1890); "La huelga general," El Productor 4, no. 194 (18 April 1890); "La Vispera" and "Huelga, no manifestación," El Productor 4, no. 197 (30 April 1890);

46. For a brief historical overview, see "El 10 de Mayo-La jornada de ocho horas," El Productor (Barcelona) 6, no. 296 (28 April 1892); for detailed reports from numerous localities, see the entire issue of El Productor 4, no. 198 (4 July 1890); on the Bilbao strike, see Juan Pablo Fusi, Política obrera en el País Vasco (1888-1923) (Madrid: Turner, 1975), 81-94.

47. "El 10 de Mayo-La jornada de ocho horas," El Productor (Barcelona) 6, no. 296 (28 April 1892); "El Congreso Amplio," El Productor 5, no. 226 (8 January 1891); "El Congreso Amplio celebrado en Madrid los días 22 al 25 Marzo," El Productor 5, no. 238 (2 April 1891); reports in El Productor 5, nos. 244-48 (7 May-4 June 1891).

49. For meeting reports, see columns "El 11 de Noviembre" and "Movimiento Obrero: Interior," El Productor (Barcelona) 5-6, nos. 273-81 (19 November 1891-14 January 1892); see also reports "Desde Logroño," "Meeting en Zaragoza," and "Desde Santander" in La Anarquía (Madrid), nos. 67-68 (18-24 December 1891) and no. 70 (8 January 1892), respectively.


51. See note 49.

52. "Misceláneas," El Productor (Barcelona) 6, no. 280 (7 January 1892); "Movimiento Obrero: Interior," El Productor 6, nos. 281 (14 January 1892), 288 (3 March 1892), 302 (9 June 1892); "Noticias varias," La Anarquía (Madrid) 3, no. 77 (Feb. 25, 1892).


56. "Lo de Jerez," El Productor (Barcelona) 6, no. 281 (14 January 1892); "¿Que ha sido lo de Jerez?," La Anarquía (Madrid) 3, no. 71 (15 January 1892); "Lo de Jerez," El Corsario (Corunna) 3, no. 87 (24 January 1892).

57. "Constatazione," La Questione Sociale (Paterson) 7, n.s., no. 102 (Sep. 7, 1901). The article is unsigned, but it can certainly be attributed to Esteve. The writer claims to know the facts by direct knowledge, and Esteve was at the time the typesetter of La Questione Sociale.

58. Vallina, Crónica de un revolucionario, 34.

59. See note 54.

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