

Which Bread Do We Eat?

We know that it's a silly and useless terminological interlude, but so be it. The more time passes, the more we are constrained to question ourselves about the meaning of little word of nine letters which is often used casually: *companion*. It seems to derive from the medieval Latin "*companio*", a term composed from the preposition "*com*" and the noun "*panis*". A companion is the one who eats the same bread, something of an intimate fellow diner or at least one who takes part in the meal.

It's a term that over time has become embarrassing, if not suspicious, at least in subversive spheres. From the time that the mania for meals of the people, where around the same dinner table one can find just about anyone, this word has taken on decidedly nauseating traits. One comes to envy the greater semantic precision adopted in France, where among anarchists a precise distinction is in force between *camarades* and *compagnons*. The first are generically all those that make up parts of the so-called Movement, the second instead are those closest and most akin.

But it is only with the latter that one breaks and eats the same bread.

This explains our indifference, which is transforming into annoyance, when we hear ourselves called comrades by the various militants and activists that infest this planet, whatever the color of their flag. Whether they are anarchists for whom the refusal of politics is only one practicable option in the midst of so many others (petitions and sabotage, it's all grist for the mill), or stalinists for whom the response to repression must be unitary (so long as the refrain is that of defending rights), the result doesn't change: who are they calling companions? Us?

They are grossly mistaken. We are not their companions, they are not out companions. The bread of revolt does not have the same flavor as that of the institutions. The bread of ethics doesn't have the same aroma as that of politics. The bread of autonomy doesn't have the same color as that of herd mentality. Perhaps at times, seen from a distance, they might even seem similar. But one only has to get close to notice the vast difference that separates them. Another thing altogether.

A person who sits at the same table and eats the same bread as judges and members of parliament, priests and journalists, dissociators and police informants, authoritarians and mind doctors, knows well that these fine people are the only ones that he can call "companion". As for us, in order to break our solitude, we prefer to go and seek our comrades elsewhere, among the thieves of fire, the revilers of public authority, the waking dreamers, the furious night owls, the seducers of nuns, the ones debauched by vice, the dabblers in clandestine cinema, the hunters for wild strawberries, the haranguers of the

clouds, the hooligans of the word, the shiners of stars, the nibblers of the golden fleece, the drunkards of the absolute ... and all the vagabonds of the spirit who never bow their heads before the good people.

These, *and these alone*, are our comrades.

(Translator's Note: In Italy, subversives of various sorts usually refer to each other as "compagno" – companion – and to my knowledge there is no separate word for "comrade" – the more common word used in English among subversives. In order to maintain the word play in this piece, without which some of the points the writers are making would be lost, I chose a more literal translation.)

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