

Willful Disobedience Volume 3, number 1

Various Authors

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A Few Words: *Plundering the Arsenal*

“The heritage of revolutionary movements
can no longer form a tradition to safeguard...
or a program to realize,
but must become an arsenal to plunder
for the ongoing use of new revolutionaries.”

The history of revolt is probably as long as the history of domination and exploitation. There have always been those who will not submit, who will defy god and master even against the greatest odds. And this history of revolt includes significant social struggles, uprisings of the multitudes of the exploited to throw off their chains in social revolution. Over the past few hundred years, these social upheaval have helped to create a revolutionary awareness that has manifested particularly in anarchist and communist theory, social analysis and practice.

This same period saw the rise of capitalism, the bourgeois revolutions that transformed the state giving rise to democratic domination (as well as other more blatantly totalitarian forms), industrialism and wage labor. But over the past sixty years or so, consequences of these transformations that were not previously fully comprehended have combined with significant ongoing changes in the ways in which domination and exploitation operate facilitated by new developments in military, police, industrial and so-called post-industrial techniques, methods and systems, developed to meet the needs of continuing social reproduction, making it necessary for clear-headed revolutionaries to develop new conceptions of the nature of the struggle against the ruling order. And so the question arises of whether the analyses and theories of the past — and the history in which they developed — have any significance for the present anarchist movement.

Certainly, adhering to the theories and analyses of the past as revolutionary truth is useless. The veneration of Kropotkin or Bakunin, Goldman or Malatesta can only transform anarchist theory and practice into a museum piece, and museums are generally showcases for that which has died.

In the same way, an uncritical approach to past uprisings does us no good. The Paris Commune, Spain in the 1930's, Hungary in '56, Paris in '68 and so on become meaningless from a projectual revolutionary perspective when they are mythologized. The ongoing struggle from which they arose disappears, and they become relics — a string of “glorious” defeats. I have no interest in participating in the creation of a Museum of Anarchy and Insurrection. I want to create anarchy and insurrection as lived realities.

But the refusal to venerate and mythologize the revolutionary past is not the same as simply rejecting it out of hand. Just as the order of domination has a history that we can examine in order to gain a greater understanding of how to fight against it, so too the struggle against this order has a history, and to simply claim that it is irrelevant to us today is to sacrifice significant weapons that we could use in our struggle here and now.

It has been said that in order to relaunch the wager of revolution, “it is necessary to put the past back into play.” But when placed in a museum to be venerated or buried in a graveyard to be ignored, the past cannot be put into play, because it has been transformed from an activity, a movement of struggle, into a dead thing. The anarchists and revolutionaries of the past developed their analyses, theories and visions not as doctrines in which to believe, but as weapons to be used against the ruling order. Certainly, much of it is irrelevant now (some of it — syndicalism, workerism, formalism and the fetish of organization and numbers, faith in progress and technology — were probably obstacles from the start), but if our intent is not merely to promote a new ideology, a new revolutionary faith; if our struggle is for the reappropriation of our lives here and now and the destruction of all that stands in the way of that project; if our aim is indeed the transformation of social relationships, the creation of a world without domination, exploitation, hierarchy...; then we will see the revolutionary past as an arsenal to be plundered, joyfully grasping whatever is useful to our present struggle. If we cannot grapple critically with the past, we will not be able to grapple critically with the present, and our current struggle will be a museum piece, a mere showcase of ideology, another game of spectacular roles that may be appealing to the media, but are of no relevance to the real struggle to destroy this society.

The Refusal of Representation

“To represent or be represented is a degradation, a reduction, both in the sense of symbolic culture and in terms of power.” — John Zerzan

Of course, it is inevitable in contemporary society that the mass media will broadcast its representations of anarchists and anarchy. And it is equally inevitable that these representations will be distorted and inaccurate, serving the interests of the ruling regime. After all, mass media is part of the power structure.

For this reason, it is as ridiculous to cry over the misrepresentations in the mass media as it is to make a fuss about the excessive use of violence by the cops or about political scandals. As anarchists, we should realize that it is the very existence of cops, governments and mass media that we oppose, not just their excesses.

In this light, attempts to manipulate media representation of anarchists have to be seen in the same light as attempts to hold the police and politicians accountable — that is, as reformist activity. Attempts by anarchists to manipulate the image of the anarchist in the media stem from an idealistic, evangelistic conception of how revolt develops and spreads. It is assumed, in this conception, that people first come to adhere to some ideology of revolt and that this ideology moves them to rise up. It, thus, becomes important to win as many people as possible to anarchist ideas in order to move them to revolt in our way. We need not even take into account the fact that historically not one revolt has started from an essentially ideological basis in order to see the fallacy of this way of thinking. To view revolt in this way is to keep it in the realm of the quantitative, the ideological and the representational — that is, within the bounds of the methodology of this society. It is not only impossible for us to accomplish the anarchist project in this way, but when we use these sorts of methods, we have already defeated ourselves by transforming our lives and projects into images, into mere representations that are, indeed, degradations.

The fact that millions of people may see the New York Times or network television does not mean that we should seek to get an “accurate” in these media. An accurate representation of a living struggle against domination or of anything truly living and passionate is impossible; inevitably what will be seen will be a deformation in the interests of domination. Even when we turn our own means of communication — our publications, pirate radio stations, etc. — into tools for propaganda, ways of winning people over, this degradation starts to creep in, because instead of being ourselves and acting on our own terms, we begin to represent ourselves and act to win the hearts and minds of others. This is indeed degradation, as revolution and anarchy cease to be our life struggle and instead become a political program in search of adherents.

So if we are to refuse all representation, we must start by refusing to cooperate with any attempt to represent us, as well as refusing to make ourselves into an image, a representation. Though we can't prevent the media from representing anarchists and anarchy, we can refuse to play along with their game, just as we can refuse to vote or to join the military. These abstentions

are all refusals to cooperate with the power structure, refusals to let our lives and activities be defined on their terms

To look at the matter from another direction, striving for self-management of the current social order is both ridiculous and counter-revolutionary, since real, full self-determination of our lives requires the destruction of this order. In the same way the attempt to self-manage one's media image also runs counter to any truly revolutionary project, because it places one's struggle squarely within the framework of representation in its most flagrant and degraded form. As with the state, the cops, capital — as with all institutions of domination — the only revolutionary relationship an anarchist can have with the mass media is a conflictual one clearly aimed at its destruction and brooking no compromise. In relation to the media, this is the minimum meaning of the refusal of representation.

Work: The Theft of Life

“What is the bombing of a judge, the kidnapping of an industrialist, the hanging of a politician, the shooting of a cop, the looting of a supermarket, the burning of a commissioner’s office, the stoning of a journalist, the heckling of an intellectual, the thrashing of an artist, in the face of the deadly alienation of our existence, the much too early sound of the alarm clock, the traffic jam on the expressway, the goods for sale lined up on the shelves?”

The alarm clock disrupts your sleep again — as always, much too early. You drag yourself from the warmth of your bed to the bathroom for a shower, a shave and a shit, then run down to the kitchen where you wash down a pastry or, if you have the time, some toast and eggs with a cup of coffee. Then you rush out the door to battle traffic jams or crowds in the subway until you arrive... at work, where your day is spent in tasks not of your choosing, in compulsory association with others involved in related tasks, the primary aim of which is the continued reproduction of the social relationships that constrain you to survive in this manner.

But this is not all. In compensation, you receive a wage, a sum of money that (after paying rent and bills) you must take out to shopping centers to buy food, clothes, various necessities and entertainment. Though this is considered your “free time” as opposed to “work time”, it too is compulsory activity that only secondarily guarantees your survival, its primary purpose again being to reproduce the current social order. And for most people, moments free of these constraints are fewer and fewer.

According to the ruling ideology of this society, this existence is the result of a social contract between equals — equals before the law that is. The worker, it is said, contracts to sell her labor to the boss for a mutually agreed upon wage. But can a contract be considered free and equal when one side holds all the power?

If we look at this contract more closely, it becomes clear that it is no contract at all, but the most extreme and violent extortion. This is currently exposed most blatantly at the margins of capitalist society where people who have lived for centuries (or, in some cases, millennia) on their own terms find their capacity to determine the conditions of their existence ripped away by the bulldozers, chainsaws, mining equipment and so on of the world’s rulers. But it is a process that has been going on for centuries, a process involving blatant, large-scale theft of land and life sanctioned and carried out by the ruling class. Bereft of the means for determining the conditions of their own existence, the exploited cannot be said, in honesty, to be contracting freely and equally with their exploiters. It is clearly a case of blackmail.

And what are the terms of this blackmail? The exploited are forced to sell the time of their life to their exploiters in exchange for survival. And this is the real tragedy of work. The social order of work is based on the imposed opposition between life and survival. The question of how one will get by suppresses that of how one wants to live, and in time this all seems natural and one narrows one’s dreams and desires to the things that money can buy.

However, the conditions of the world of work do not just apply to those with jobs. One can easily see how the unemployed searching for a job from fear of homelessness and hunger is caught

up in the world of work. But the same holds for the recipient of state aid whose survival depends on the existence of the assistance bureaucracy... and even for those for whom the avoidance of getting a job has become such a priority that one's decisions come to center around scams, shoplifting, dumpster diving — all the various ways to get by without a job. In other words, activities that could be fine means for supporting a life project become ends in themselves, making mere survival one's life project. How, really, does his differ from a job?

But what is the real basis of the power behind this extortion that is the world of work? Of course, there are laws and courts, police and military forces, fines and prisons, the fear of hunger and homelessness — all very real and significant aspects of domination. But even the state's force of arms can only succeed in carrying out its task because people submit. And here is the real basis of all domination — the submission of the slaves, their decision to accept the security of known misery and servitude rather than risk the unknown of freedom, their willingness to accept a guaranteed but colorless survival in exchange for the possibility of truly living that offers no guarantees.

So in order to put an end to one's slavery, to move beyond the limits of merely getting by, it is necessary to make a decision to refuse to submit; it is necessary to begin to reappropriate one's life here and now. Such a project inevitably places one in conflict with the entire social order of work; so the project of reappropriating one's existence must also be the project of destroying work. To clarify, when I say "work", I do not mean the activity by which one creates the means of one's existence (which ideally would never be separate from simply living) but rather a social relationship that transforms this activity into a sphere separate from one's life and places it in the service of the ruling order so that the activity, in fact, ceases to have any direct relationship to the creation of one's existence, but rather only maintains it in the realm of mere survival (at whatever level of consumption) through a series of mediations of which property, money and commodity exchange are among the most significant. This is the world in we must destroy in the process of taking back our lives, and the necessity of this destruction makes the project of the reappropriation of our lives one with the projects of insurrection and social revolution.

There are no Natural Catastrophes

(This is based on a text written by anonymous anti-authoritarians at the time of a major flood in Italy)

More than twenty dead, about ten missing, 40,000 evacuated. And hundreds of millions of dollars in damages. As if it had not been raindrops, but bombs falling on their heads. As if it had not been a flood, but a war, devastating their homes. In fact this was so. But the enemy that struck so harshly was not the river or the mountain. These are not, in fact, weapons of vengeance for a nature that we are accustomed to thin of as hostile. The war that has been going on for centuries now is not between humanity and the natural environment as so many would like to have us believe in order to guarantee our obedience. Our enemy is our own activity. That is the war. This civilization is the war. Nature is simple its principle battlefield. We caused these powerful downpours by transforming the atmospheric climate with our industrial activity. Our activity has eroded the embankments of the rivers, trashing their beds and deforesting their shores. We have made bridges collapse by building them with defective materials chosen in order to win the contract. We have devastated entire villages by building houses in high-risk areas. We have bred jackals who look for profit in every situation. We have neglected to take precaution measures against such events, being only concerned with opening new sports arenas, shopping malls and metro and rail lines.

And how are we responsible? We have allowed all this to happen repeatedly, delegating the decisions that effect our lives to others. And now, after having devastated the entire planet in order to move faster, eat faster, work faster, make money faster, watch TV faster and “live” faster, do we still dare to complain when we discover we also die faster?

There are no natural catastrophes, only social catastrophes. If we don't want to continue to be victims of unpredictable earthquakes, exceptional floods, unknown viruses and whatever else, our only choice is to act against our enemy: our way of life, our values, our habits, our culture, our indifference. It is not against nature that we so urgently need to declare war, but against this society and all its institutions. If we are not able to invent a different existence and fight to realize it, we are preparing ourselves to die in that which others have decided and imposed. And to die in silence, just as we have always lived.

Beyond Slow Death

There are those who accept the prison of work in exchange for a miserable paycheck with resignation. There are those who nurture a great passion for work and, always in exchange for a wage, are willing to sacrifice every moment of their life to it. So, in exchange for a higher salary and some privilege, Vladimir Nechai — nuclear physicist — along with some notable colleagues had made his living since 1958 by burying himself in the federal atomic study center, otherwise known as Celjabinski-70, in the Urals, with the task of dedicating himself to the study of increasingly powerful weapons in absolute seclusion. He was shut up in one of the many “closed cities”, identified only by a monogram, in the service of the most secret atomic arsenal. But due to the collapse of the Soviet empire, and particularly the consequent economic crisis, even the minds of the most servile workers lost their patience, being no longer paid for their existence sacrificed to the state.

So Vladimir Nechai, who became the director of the nuclear center in 1988, couldn't take the stress any more. Feeling powerless and enraged at not being paid the trifle of a thousand dollars in more than five months, he blew his brains out. The bunker-city didn't offer him any options for changing his activities: “do the science or die”, and instead of leaving to sell his brain to western powers like some of his colleagues, he exploded his into the air.

I say, it's better this way. At least he can no longer contribute to the healthy functioning of the industry of slow death that is work. What's more, the nitwit was a patriotic designer of murderous devices, just as contemptible as the state official who orders them, the banker who financed them and the military personnel who launch them.

The Russian economic crisis, along with other things, strikes the slaves of society. Miners, teachers, doctors, soldiers in turmoil, rumbling, who threaten “revolt” against the government of “thieves and incompetents”, convinced that a regime even more militarized than it already is could restore the smooth functioning of the daily prison.

There are even those who grind their teeth like the cosmonauts, defenseless, powerless, in the MIR space station with the toilet overflowing with organic refuse because the Moscow authorities, due to the insurmountable deficit, cancelled voyages of the shuttle that would transfer the load of space shit.

And it seems to me that shit is what really unites this whole miserable spectacle. That of the daily demands of work, that spattered out of the head of the suicidal nuclear physicist and that in which the filthy cosmonauts were on the verge of drowning.

— Alx

And God is a Pig

Blasphemers, whether restrained or hardened, whether spontaneous or affected, we are now reaching the point in which the authorities will recognize your full right to the use of a practice that from time immemorial, has united the people of the Western world in a chorus that is never silenced.

Blasphemy – which, as history teaches, was born with the advent of religion – is the precise outline of divine scriptures elaborated by the popular imagination. Power has always considered the blasphemer as a hostile figure, always obstructing her, at times in a bloody manner. When religious dogma represented the central element of the dominant culture and politics, the executioners' swords were made ready to quiet the foul language that arose from the masses, in order to prevent it from passing beyond the insult of the sacred symbols of power to its direct physical destruction.

Blaspheming god and his worthy cronies is a practice that can attain, in its most noble and, hence, courageous statement, the meaning of revolt. I am not referring to the customary blasphemy slipped absent-mindedly into the verbal refrains of so many, but to the vigorous, lively and aware profanation of the baby Jesus, his parents and associates, his beautiful little chapels and his groveling black-robed servants.

In a recent judgment, an Italian judge established that blaspheming god is a crime, while from now on the virgin can be made into a laughing-stock with the most colorful expressions in full legality. A decision that is the fruit of an accurate theological distinction, but that raises an important question: will removing the prohibition against such blasphemy kill it, undermining its most intimate meaning by eliminating the very savor of transgression? Could it even reach the point of sharing in the pathetic end of its bitter enemy and fellow traveler – religion – which has already become a shrine for tourists, having transferred its sacred nature into the more modern abstraction, humanity? But no, I see that there are still many despicable sacred canopies to be desecrated; it is probably just a question of seeking out new subjects to which to willingly devote oneself.

Without any restraint of course. There is nothing sadder than an insult drenched in the shadow of remorse.

Canenero

Insurrection in Argentina

In early January, it was difficult to know how events in Argentina would develop. From here in the United States, it was still possible to think that the rebellion there was just a momentary flare-up sparked by the intensification of the economic crisis that Argentina has been experiencing for years, but the struggle continues and is developing in very interesting directions.

Although things were fairly quiet during the first few days of Duhalde's presidency, this is probably not (as AP and Reuter's would have us think) due to any real expectation of change. The people of Argentina were far too familiar with the difference between the populist rhetoric of the Peronists and their actual policies. By January 11, demonstrations were a daily occurrence often involving attacks on banks, ATM machines, government offices and the homes of politicians. The poor, the unemployed, farmers, workers and the so-called middle classes — in other words, the full range of those exploited, excluded or marginalized by capital — have been carrying out such actions throughout the country.

But one of the most interesting aspects of this uprising is the apparently spontaneous development of the neighborhood assemblies. According to reports I've read, these assemblies first arose on December 20 in neighborhoods in Buenos Aires as a way of coordinating the various activities of struggle. By mid-February, assemblies had arisen in cities through out the country. They continue to function in an informal manner, as a tool of the people in revolt for coordinating their activity. The Argentine Libertarian Federation, an anarchist group, describes these assemblies in an undated article that appeared in translation on www.infoshop.org/inews on February 26 under the title, "Argentina: between poverty and protest":

"The destruction of savings through the devaluation of the currency, and the increase in unemployment, hunger and neglect have given rise to a form of struggle in our country beyond the sphere of established politics and public life: the *cacerolazos* and the neighborhood assemblies. These neighborhood assemblies and their committees have been formed by the unemployed, the underemployed, and people marginalized and excluded from capitalist society: including professionals, workers, small retailers, artists, craftspeople, all of them also neighbors.¹ Each assembly has its own characteristics, but non-delegation of power, self-management, horizontal struggle and opposition to voting are libertarian socialist slogans one hears frequently.² We should also point out that these neighborhood assemblies, which meet on corners in

¹ If this listing of those "marginalized and excluded from capitalist society" seems strange to U.S. and European readers, we need to remember that the freeze on withdrawals from banks pushed the so-called middle classes into a state of economic marginalization and desperation comparable to that of 25% of the Argentine population that is unemployed. — editor

² The description of these expressions of the practical refusal of hierarchical relationships and formalization as "libertarian socialist slogans" seems to me to be rather opportunistic. The call for such a methodology of struggle does not reflect any political program, not even that of "libertarian socialists", but rather the refusal of politics and the active desire to replace it with the autonomous self-organization of life. — editor

several districts of Buenos Aires [...] also hold weekly coordinating meetings in Parque Centenario (Centennial Park). These have become invaluable spaces for debate and deliberation, not only because of the large numbers attending, but also because of the subjects brought up and considered. The meetings are open and anyone who wishes can participate, so often one hears self-serving speeches by political or union leaders. But the attendees have learned to pick out this kind of ‘cooked’ verbiage.”

From this description, the assemblies appear to remain in the sphere of informality — there is no membership, no ideological framework and no political program upon which they are based. Thus, the assemblies remain a fluid tool for organizing the political struggle without hierarchy or politics. Nonetheless, there are reports that in some assemblies, one hears the “language of party politics”, statements like this: “To get out of this crisis requires more politics, but real politics.” [emphasis added — editor] In addition, certain assemblies have apparently developed “executive committees” to draft agendas for the assemblies — a step toward formalization that could open the door to hierarchy and the development of a political leadership claiming to represent the struggle.

Thus one important task for Argentine anarchists and anti-authoritarian revolutionaries to consider is exposing and opposing any political or union leader who opportunistically tries to use the assemblies to further his or her own career or who attempts to channel the activities of the assemblies into “the sphere of established politics”. In addition, it is important to oppose all tendencies toward formalization, to stand firmly against any proposal for re-organizing the assemblies in a way that would provide a framework for politicians and self-styled leaders to impose their agendas. I am certain the anarchists in Argentina are quite aware of these dangers and quite vigilant. And I suspect that many who do not call themselves anarchists are equally hostile to anyone who wants to claim to represent them. But for those who have asked me in the past what I mean when I speak of anarchists intervening in a struggle in a way that fits in with their aims, this is precisely the type of activity I have in mind. The aim of the anarchist revolutionary is to recreate life free of domination, exploitation or hierarchy, to develop the self-organization of existence without politics or formalization, without the state or economy, to destroy everything that stands in the way of the full realization of each one of us as unique individuals. And in the course of a struggle like that in Argentina, this aim expresses itself in vehement rejection of all politicians and leaders, even those who claim to support the struggle. After all, though repression is certainly the greatest external threat to the insurrection, the greatest internal threat is its recuperation by politicians and union leaders who are also enemies of real liberation since they too prefer the passivity of the exploited. That is why they offer to act on the behalf of those in struggle.

But for now it appears that the struggle in Argentina is opening. People are exploring and experimenting with new ways of relating and organizing life, venturing tentatively into the unknown. To quote the Argentine Libertarian Federation once again:

“Each of our neighbor’s expressions becomes a communitarian thought, charged with questions, where the posing of questions is what counts the most, not their imagined answers. Today we can say joyfully that words and direct action have begun to coincide. There is reason to hope that all Argentineans now know for certain who has been blocking our freedoms, excluding people, forcing our relatives and friends into exile and mortgaging the future of our children and grandchildren.

“Now the fear in our society has turned into courage.”

Bolivia: Revolt Continues to Boil

As the Bolivian government, under president Jorge Quiroga, strives to enforce social peace through murder, torture and general repression, the exploited continue to rebel fiercely. Like all real large-scale struggles, this one is not always coherent nor does it always question the totality of the relationships of domination and exploitation, but the practice of revolt has certainly carried this struggle in an insurrectionary direction (encouraged both by Bolivian anarchists and by certain indigenous people from cultures in which hierarchical relationships and formalization are nearly non-existent).

The latest round of protests, blockades and battles with the armed guards of the ruling order was sparked by the expulsion of Evo Morales from the Bolivian parliament. But the movement very quickly left behind much of its reformist baggage. It is likely that this is due in part to a practice of collective, autonomous, direct action in struggles that have been going on over the last two years. A communiqué from the Bolivian anarchist group, Juventudes Libertarias, dated February 6, gives a description of aspects of the struggle:

“[...] Facing the violence of the State/Capital, the proletariat is defending itself. In the last month, three soldiers and a policeman have been finished off in Chapare; while in Sucre a group of small debtors, defending themselves from foreclosure, threw gasoline at a squad of police and set them on fire. In the locality of Pocitos, thousands of border workers made a group of elite police flee and burned the border post with Argentina; on 2nd February last, a march of thousands of workers, coca farmers, college students, small debtors, teachers, health-workers, water-workers and workers without retirement ended up throwing stones, firecrackers and paint at the police station in the city of Cochabamba, in protest at the ferocious repression exerted by the elite forces – the “dalmatas” – accused of torturing political prisoners with electrical charges applied to the gums, finally a group of young people dressed in black threw a homemade bomb, which injured five policemen, including a senior officer.

“Over the last two weeks, Cochabamba has become the epicenter of the protests, with thousands taking to the streets, raising barricades, making bonfires, setting vehicles on fire in some cases and attacking shops selling luxury goods, as well as the court building, laying barbed wire and glass to stop the passage of the brutal body of police, that finally arrived, capturing even children of 11 years of age and using heavy arms [...]

“The social movement in Cochabamba, which includes coca growers, demands the abolition of parliament and the formation of a popular assembly [...]

“The iron resistance of the cocaleros movement is partly explained by the flexible organization it practices, being based on horizontal, communitarian traditions of the ayilu and ayni, which have a self-managing tradition.

“A similar organization has also been developed by the natives of the plateau, who this week have added to the mobilizations by cutting the routes, together with farmers of other regions [...]” (The full text of this communiqué can be found at www.infshop.org/inews by checking the South America topics.)

The struggle in Bolivia has several interesting factors. It is a struggle of all of groups of the exploited, each with their specific problems and experiences of exploitation; but recognizing their struggle in the struggle of the others, they act in solidarity with one another. Furthermore, since the resurgence of struggle in 2000, the method of the struggle has been predominantly that of autonomous direct action. There is evidence that these factors are beginning to promote the development of a revolutionary intelligence, an increasing quickness in seeing through the reformist illusions that could recuperate the struggle, as is evidenced by the call for the abolition of parliament and the development of popular assemblies which could be a way of self-organizing life and the struggle (as long as formalization and the politics that tends to bring are carefully avoided). In relation to this, it is particularly interesting that the traditional informal and non-hierarchical social organizations of many of the native farmers have provided a basis for organizing their struggle along the same lines. Although the communiqué from Juventudes Libertarias did not go into details about why the border post shared with Argentina was attacked, it certainly expresses a potential for the opening of active international solidarity between the insurgent exploited in Bolivia and those struggling in Argentina.

But, though it seems that the coherence of the struggle in Bolivia is increasing, it still seems to be critical only of the bureaucratic organization of unions, not of unionism itself, and an examination of insurrections going back at least as far as the revolutionary movement of the 1930's in Spain shows that unions have always played a compromising role that has been a key factor in undermining several uprisings (including the Spanish revolution, sacrificed to an “anti-fascist” coalition, and May '68 in France). Furthermore, Juventudes Libertarias mention leaders of various movements who keep the fight “on the level of revenge which eliminates all historical perspective” from the struggle. Nonetheless, the movement is young and strong, and appears to be gaining in perception.

He Jokes With Men by Penelope Nin

“But expropriations and violent actions that put the lives of people at risk, and more generally the theory and practice of illegalism at all costs are far from our anarchism. Such actions are in clear contrast with the anti-violent Malatestian spirit that we have made our own.”

(from *Germinal*, #71/72, p. 26)

The greatest misfortune that can befall a human being endowed with any quality is to be surrounded by followers. As long as he remains alive, he will be perpetually compelled to keep watch so that nothing stupid is said or done in his name, toil that will prove useless however when, after his death, the initiates quarrel over how to advance the path of his endeavor. The followers are never at the level of their “teacher”, since only those who lack their own ideas take on those of others — becoming, precisely, their followers. Thus, followers not only prove to be incapable of causing something that has already been started to advance, but since they lack the qualities of the one who came before them, they easily reach the point of distorting and betraying the ideas they claim to support.

The phenomenon, deprecable in itself, takes on ludicrous and even amusing features and directions, particularly when the unfortunate “teacher” is an anarchist, that is to say an individual hostile to all authority and therefore opposed in principle to the herd mentality. And yet who can deny that even within the anarchist movement such cases have occurred? To avoid going too far, it is enough to consider Errico Malatesta, the famous Italian anarchist.

All the friends and scholars of the thoughts of Malatesta have had to agree on one fact. His sole preoccupation, his sole desire, throughout his life was to make revolution. For Malatesta, there was no doubt: anarchists are such because they want anarchy and it is only possible to realize anarchy by making revolution, a revolution that would necessarily be violent, the first step of which is insurrection. It seems to be a banality, and indeed it is. And yet it is a banality from which many anarchists tend to distance themselves with a sense of disgust.

Luigi Fabbri wrote: “Insurrection is the necessary and inescapable event of every revolution, the concrete event through which it becomes reality for everyone. It is from this fact that Malatesta’s aversion for every theory and method that tends, directly or indirectly, to discredit it, to avert the attention of the masses and the activity of revolutionaries from it, to replace it with means that are apparently more convenient and peaceful grew.”

Not just revolutionary, since “anyone can call themselves revolutionary while using the prudence to postpone the desired transformation to far distant times (when the time is ripe, as they say),” Malatesta was above all an insurrectionist inasmuch as he wanted to make the revolution immediately — a revolution understood “in the sense of violent change carried out through force against the preserving powers; and it thus implies material struggle, armed insurrection, with the retinue of barricades, armed groups, the confiscation of goods from the class against which one fights, sabotage of the means of communications, etc.” — not in a distant and undefined future,

but immediately, as quickly as possible, as soon as the occasion presented itself, an occasion that had to be created intentionally by anarchists if it did not come on its own through natural events.

Yes, I know; who is not familiar with certain critiques Malatesta made of violence and polemics that he wrote about Emile Henry or Paolo Schichi? Nevertheless, Malatesta did not deny the legitimacy and even the necessity of the use of violence as such; he only opposed a violence that “strikes blindly, without distinguishing between the guilty and the innocent.” It is no accident that the example of blind violence that he usually gave was that of the bomb that exploded in Barcelona during a religious procession, causing forty deaths and numerous injuries. This is because he would have no critique to make in the face of rebellious actions against precise targets that have no consequence for extraneous people. In fact, in the course of one of his famous interviews with *Le Figaro*, in which the interviewer tried to press him to disapprove of Ravachol’s bombs, and of the attack at the boulevard Magenta, Malatesta answered: “Your conclusions are hasty. In the affair of rue Clichy, it seems quite clear to me that it was intended to blow up a judge; but I regret that it was carried out — quite involuntarily, I believe — in a way that brought injury to people whom he had not considered. As to the bomb of boulevard Magenta — oh! I have no reservations about that! Lherot and Very had become accomplices of the police and it was a fine act of struggle to blow them up.”

It seems clear that all the discussion and polemics that occurred in those distant years — that certain present-day anarchists run through again in order to sell us the image of an anti-violent Malatesta — were not in fact aimed at the use of violence in itself, but only the limits one could not exceed without placing the very principles of anarchism in question, or at most those limits suggested by considerations of a tactical order.

But let’s leave “the dark end of an earlier century” and the polemics that then raged in the anarchist movement, and return to the present. No explosive actions claimed by anarchists in recent years could be considered as being carried out in a “blind” and “insensitive” manner. Rather all could be said to have been directed against the structures of domination without putting “the lives of people at risk.” So how can one justify the repudiation of these actions on the part of certain anarchists? Certainly not by borrowing from the thoughts of Malatesta since saying that there is a limit to the use of violence is not the same thing as saying that one must never have recourse to it.

Having recourse to the dead does not serve to justify one’s indolence.

Marriages of Convenience

I suppose it could be seen as a return to the basics. After all, evidence indicates that marriage had its origins in the need for social cohesion and the establishment of property rights. So the sacredness of marriage has always been an economic proposition.

In recent times, the illusion that marriage had a connection to passion, desire and love has been promoted, most likely due to its usefulness to the culture mills. After all this conception has produced such cultural commodities as romance novels, pop songs and romantic movies. But the insertion of the explosive material of passion into the institution of marriage was bound to have ruinous effects.

So George W. Bush's recent proposal to use welfare money to promote marriage as a way out of poverty is simply an attempt to bring marriage back to its roots, making it a matter of social and economic convenience. Convenient for whom is another question. Clearly, mostly for the rulers of our current existence, since by placing the blame for social misery on the breakdown of an institution that has always been one of its primary sources, it places the blame on individual failure. This is the typical misdirection used by the rulers of this world in order to guarantee that the social order of domination and exploitation does not itself get called into question.

The Maastricht Plague

When I show that the world is lost by looking at its symptoms, one of the lost always comes and says to me: Yes, but what can be done about the symptoms? They are obligated and willingly do absolutely nothing about them. Ah, I also willingly do absolutely nothing, and yet I am obligated. And everything is going smoothly and that is delightful, and no one stands there twiddling their thumbs. It's just that suddenly a bit of trash refuses to obey. It does not want to vanish when someone, for the sake of convenience, has thrown it away; it will continually bring itself back up. It is quite annoying, and so one is forced to intervene with a hammer. But it still wriggles. Then it is shot. Then an incredible apparatus is prepared in the attempt to pacify it. Life has become terribly complicated. In the end, everything is thrown into confusion because a certain thing in nature has not wanted to adapt itself to the system. There would be more innocence in the world if people considered themselves responsible for all those things about which they can do nothing. But troublesome things, as we know, can be swept away.

Canenero

Nostalgia For God *by Alfredo M. Bonanno*

The fear of the future, of the unknown, of the thing that awaits us around the corner, gives us the strongest thrust to shut ourselves in the house, barricade ourselves, define the territory of property as sacred, consecrate ourselves as an enclosed being and, finally, place a superior substance, an unassailable, and therefore unfathomable, reference beyond ourselves, really in the sphere of chaos and death, to offer us certainty and stability.

The very mental process at the foundation of so much revolutionary thought, from which we draw the elements for building the passage (violent, without a doubt; this is not the nullifying point) to the future society, originates in a desire to save ourselves from the mortal danger that anguishing uncertainty points out to us. In this way, “liberation” can assume a form that is anything but liberating. Thus, we imagine a society in which every possible evil that now incites us has ceased to exist, a society in which there will no longer be power and domination, leaders and hierarchy, exploitation and suffering, disease and boredom; a society of equals, united, a society of beauty from which all baseness and sorrow are forever exiled.

It is necessary to move slowly with these super-determinations of the liberated society. From one side, the mechanism has always been simple enough. It suffices to put off into the future (that future which frightened us up until a moment ago) the task, which we could take in hand now, of realizing all the things that are missing in the present, carrying the traces, at times perhaps negligible, to the ultimate outcome. Once that which oppresses us vanishes, its mere absence will end up defining “freedom”. We don’t understand that in doing this we repeat, with the best intentions, what faith in god has done for millennia. We leave to the god of History the procedure that was once entrusted to the god of religion. We once again have nostalgia for god.

But as long as this is all we do, it is nothing more than a compromise like any other, a talisman that is a wee bit heavy and troublesome to drag behind us, but nothing dangerous in the true and proper sense of the word. But, in fact, we don’t limit ourselves to doing this. We are moved by the spirit that sees the greatest good (freedom) in the future, as that which positively puts an end to the evils and fears of today, evils and fears that we know quite well because we suffer them as a consequence of everyday life. Therefore, we must place limits on what happens today, that is to say, we must realize a project that omits this unchanging eventuality, this element that is external to both our daily lack and that final diminution of the evil that awaits us, that appears around every dark corner on the path.

In fact, in order for liberated society to exist as the concrete elimination of the evils and fears of today, there must be a mechanism intrinsic to History capable of realizing it. In short, it is not only necessary for god to exist, but also to act in the world. Thus, history becomes the kingdom of god projected into everyday reality, secularized, provided with order and periodic examinations that we don’t merely manage to understand, but that in the long run turn out to be welcome and consoling.

In this perspective, all my projects are marked by the shadow of god. My fear has rebuilt divinity and has placed me once again in its power. The organizing structures of life, those cir-

cumscribed spheres that define the field of my daily activity and, precisely for this reason, render it possible, themselves take on particular characteristics due to my nostalgia. God rules me even in the smallest particulars. Even if I no longer attribute importance to genuflection as I once did, even if I have now become an arrogant, secular person, in the discourses of fear and cowardice, I am always the little man I once was, and like all little men, I become aggressive and authoritarian, I seek to build forms of domination that will guarantee to me that some outstanding, violent lunatic doesn't put my new security at risk.

At bottom, all domination is based on the idea of being able to regulate the unforeseeable future. All domination has managed to exorcise fear and uncertainty about the future. Thus, the refusal of domination passes through the conscious and courageous restoration of instability, the unknown that may await us around the corner, as well.

This is the beauty of struggle: that it projects us into an entire world to discover and make our own in ever new ways, beyond schemes and obligatory paths. The risk may be great, the realms of certainty may shrink, but there is no alternative. History is no longer the bed of the sleeping god, but the scene, partial and often incomprehensible, of human events, the place where barbarism and death are always waiting, where there can never be a definitively liberated society, where there will not even be a path to liberation unless we find it ourselves, without exorcisms or talismans.

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