

# Demands

Anselmo Lorenzo

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“What do you want, my children? Jobs? Regional autonomy? A pay raise? The vote at the age of 15? Retirement at the age of 45? Equality of the sexes? Keep on asking in order and all of your complaints will be properly treated with the due form.”

Every favor that the master grants consolidates him, since he is the Master. But the fact is that the subjects get what they want. What they want? Yes, and along the way, they learn to want what they are ordered to want.

Do I ask the Master leave to fall in love with my aunt? My dear man, the ideas you have! One doesn't ask this of the Master.

Why? It is premature; a Ministry of Erotic Relations has not been created. But will one be created? Without a doubt, and then you will be able to demand the right to fall in love with whoever you desire. For now, be patient; and tell me, meanwhile, why not demand the right to freely import Australian cars? It is not shameful to have a desire for an Australian car (since it is your right to desire it). Isn't one the owner of one's desires? Why does one want the money one earns if one cannot spend it on what one desires? Isn't it intolerable that the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs place so many obstacles in your way that you can't act on your own? Come on! Let's unite – all the partisans for the free importation of cars – and make our demand. Petitions! Strikes! Demonstrations in the streets! Presentations of bills by our representatives in the Chambers! Let's demand! Good, but it is necessary to recognize that the matter of jobs, of autonomy, of votes, of wages, of pensions, or that of the equality of rights between the sexes, is more important and serious than Australian cars. You mean that these demands are nearer to the desires of people than Australian cars or amorous relations with my aunt?

It is necessary for us to reflect. What relationship is there between the creation of jobs and the desire not to work? What relationship is there between earlier retirement, the four day week, 33 days a year of vacation, and the desire not to have a schedule whether it's Saturday or Monday so that one can pass night freely as the moon turns around us or go gather blackberries whenever your friends and the blackberries ask it of you? What relationship is there between regional (or, pardon, national or whatever one wants to call it) and the desire of people not to have to obey decisions originating from above or not to tolerate taxes the purpose of which the don't know and organizations the use of which they don't understand? How does such autonomy, granted or to be granted, approach the desire of individuals to reach an agreement between those of the

countryside and those of the city and its surroundings in all the circumstances that commonly present themselves? What relationship is there between the vote for adolescents and the desire never to become an adult? What relationship is there between the right of women to occupy the positions of men and the desire that the domination of men ceases? Between the right of a woman to have the children she wants, with who and when she wants and the urgent desire that more future car buyers are not born every year?

Finally, one can devote oneself to having nothing to do with this; but it is necessary to be realistic, my friend, and certainly these demands are a step forward, toward more advanced goals in the direction of these latter aims you speak about so naively. Autonomy, just like the nationalization of enterprises, moves toward the goal of an authentic liberation of Capital and the State. The vote for adolescents is a means by which to impose laws that are less and less dictated by the criteria of adults and are more and more youthful. Pay raises are of use to workers and to employees at least until there's a new raise in prices and a new demand, because they feel that they are more their own master and find themselves in a better position to impose their class interests on the bodies that exploit them. The four-day work week and the seven-hour work day represent a step forward toward the progressive liberation from forced labor and for enjoying one's free time. The equality of women in society and at work is a step... for the things they desire.

Yes,... If today some still continue to believe that things function in this way, if they don't perceive the quality of the positive outcome of demands, if they don't understand one bit how the apparatus functions and that the demands that succeed are always revealed to be a swindle, as well as a renewal and reinforcement of the powers that be, then it means that one must have studied realism at the Polytechnic Institute of Colorful Dreams.

Oh, demands! Words have their destiny. This well-known legal term is already ill-omened. The Latin word for "demand" is a legal term, *rei vindictio*<sup>1</sup> [literally "king's protection or vengeance]: a claim of something one considers as one's property. I imagine that this is what the swindle has been based on. It seems that initially the operation worked like this: the one who demanded the right to something – a piece of land, for example – together with another who made a counterclaim presented themselves before a magistrate or judge and set to work on the matter in question – a clump of disputed earth for example – so that, being informed by the arguments of both claimants, each claiming to own the right to the thing, the judge would make a decision and grant it to one or to the other. It is clear that, in time, in this triangle formed by two rivals and a representative of the law with the miserable thing at the center, the relations between terms are changed in a significant way. In fact, whereas in this original scheme, the hands of the claimants were directed toward the thing, and whereas the authority appeared to remain above and outside the conflict – as an impartial witness and a above all judge between the hands for disposing of the thing in the just position (to the one side, or to the other side, or, like Solomon, right down the middle of the thing)—, today, due to demands among other things the plot has advanced to such a point that the hands, both of them, all of them, are directed toward the heights, toward the summit on which the judge stands, while from below, they ask for the concession or the free distribution of the thing demanded; which, consequently – and this is obvious, has become, first

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, a literal translation was not possible for this passage. In Italian, the word for a demand is "*rivindicazione*" which comes directly from this Latin term. The English "demand" comes from a Latin base as well: *de + mandare*, which apparently means "to entrust to", and so is, in its own way, equally ill-omened for those of us seeking to determine our lives on our own terms.

of all, the property of the judge who can thus, yielding to requests and pressure, hand it over to those whose claims he considers to be just.

There is no need to dwell on the fact that this process has constituted and still constitutes a way of guaranteeing and strengthening power. But then in the meantime such a process could not be carried to its end without an accompanying change of the thing itself. In the original shema, this might still be a bit of earth, maybe a slave, in short, a thing with obvious utility and use value for those who lay claim to it. But when the things have become concessions from the Master, have further more become abstract rights, amounts of time and money, arrangements for the future improvement of working conditions or the legal position of the claimant and, at the extreme point of the bureaucratic progress of the State and the corporation, a change in the editing of a paragraph of regulation, the creation of a new department for the administration of satisfied demands, the appearance of a few initials such as "Smug 3-m-25" the importance of which the claimants still don't understand, and their official representatives or the experts on the subject are there to pretend that they, yes, they are able to understand.

And another transformation accompanies the one around the claimants. To the extent that they grow accustomed to modifying their cries in accordance with the initials and numbers that the social order imposes on them, they present their claim in the language of order, in a way that this order can understand their demand and act in consequence; at they same time, they cannot avoid becoming convinced little by little on their own that this was really what they desired – cars within everyone's reach, 33 vacation days a year, retirement at 45, color television, a confirmed minimum wage, a clean niche in a protected apartment block, equality of rights, a democratic constitution, horizontal labor unions and two hundred miles of highway – ; so that in the end their desires com to coincide with the development projects of the state and business. And these fine people, by whom it is presumed that the desire for things and the capacity of enjoying them come, only constitute a small domestic motor that, while it continues to produce work, produces the petitions which power and money need in order to change and continue to perpetuate themselves.

**But, oh! My heart, stop reasoning and limit yourself to proposing to your comrades in suffering the following cry: "Citizens, don't make demands!" Lets demand no more. Let's leave them to do their best on their own to organize themselves and us (to the extent to which we leave things be), and to advance towards the end that governs all their functions, towards death. Undoubtedly, they will continue to much harm to people, but still less than they would have done if we, the ones below, were to collaborate through our demands. Of course! And in the meantime, every one considers the rights that seem good to them, and so as not to demand and not to make a claim to the Master that this is justice, everyone takes the thing directly in hand. But, old chap, where are you trying to get to? Anarchy? Chaos? Don't choke yourself, comrade. I'll talk to you about chaos another day.**

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