

Riffraff in the libertarian milieu

Argelaga

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“Break out of the ghetto” is a refrain often heard in libertarian milieus, which—in view of the confused and murky situation in which social struggles are unfolding, struggles which are themselves marginal—only means that those who are singing this tune are ready to turn their backs on the truth about reality for the sake of an overdose of activism. While it is true that enclosing oneself in a short-sighted veganism, a merely verbal feminism, reading Foucault or involvement in the punk scene is just an innocuous way to adjust to a miserable reality, blind voluntarism or organic militancy is no better. It leads nowhere; it is bread for today and hunger for tomorrow. These are times of decomposition with hardly any movements, without lucid, angry majorities, and all we can do is to try to correctly analyze the present by highlighting the contradictions that might enlarge the cracks in the system and nourish revolt. The crisis follows its own rhythm, slow and frustrating, susceptible to the rise of all kinds of false illusions, the only kind of ideas around which majorities can presently rally. To close one’s eyes to past experiences and accept the consequences of flagrant nonsense in order to break out of one’s isolation and enjoy a substitute for real action does not solve the problem, but only makes it worse. Common sense is mistaken on this point: just because there are lots of us does not mean that we will get the last laugh.

We sincerely believe that the presence of refractory anarchists in social movements contributes to the radicalization of those movements. If, in addition, these anarchists are organized in affinity groups and federate with each other with more or less formal bonds, so much the better. They are the continuators of a historical tradition that was once fruitful. Self-managed spaces, cooperatives without shareholder-members or wage workers, and neighborhood assemblies are necessary instruments of struggle. But, unfortunately, if Teruel exists, so, too, does right-wing anarchism. It must be admitted that the results of the municipal elections of May 24, 2015 restored faith in government institutions among broad sectors of the population, which were more disillusioned in politics during the 15M movement. The more edifying variety of anarchism has ceased to be fashionable in certain alternative milieus. A considerable number of politically correct libertarians have been little less than traumatized at seeing their natural environment, the pauperized and computer-literate middle class, students and local bureaucrats, migrate to other pastures. Their reaction was not long in coming: in a multitude of meetings, those who were envious of the success of non-anarchist tendencies denounced “blinkered, short-term perspectives” [*cortoplacismo*]; generals without an army called for an “organized social anarchism” with “ma-

majority appeal”, and, finally, the most original of their comrades felt the burning need for “a major social initiative” that would lead us to the “conquest of a real democracy”. Such is the case with the authors of the manifesto entitled, “Construct a Strong *Pueblo*¹ to Make Another World Possible”, a veritable pastiche of civil society ideas which has bedazzled the hundreds of supporters who signed it.

With regard to questions of imagination and craft, there is not much that can be said about this manifesto’s authors; only that, in the last analysis, in the era of liquid modernity, what matters is skill in composing text messages and using *apps*, rather than knowing how to write sentences more than one line long. And the manifesto’s title alludes to the slogan, “another world is possible”, made famous by the anti-globalization movement; we must recall, however, that the latter was referring to yet another kind of globalization, to another kind of capitalism, not to a “break-away model” with which “we can reconstruct ourselves as a free and sovereign society” by way of a “libertarian democracy of people, not of markets”. The manifesto’s analysis of the “transition” is as simplistic as the “once upon a time” of fairy tales: it could not be further removed from a sober assessment. “Democracy” is a word that is repeated *ad nauseum*, a patent concession to the *indignados* of 15M, in close conjunction with “our rights” and “the defense of our liberties and common goods” against an “elite” that “does not represent us”. What liberties, and what goods? Words such as “bourgeoisie”, “proletariat”, “class consciousness”, “ruling class”, “exploitation”, “misery”, “revolution”, “anarchy” and “self-management” are completely absent, which is normal if we recall that the manifesto is aimed at the lumpen-bourgeoisie and is written in the latter’s language, and that part of this lumpen-bourgeoisie has preferred to vote for “comrades” who “are opting for the institutional path”. What we have here is an attempt to manufacture an anarchist “brand” that appeals to the middle classes, and that is why the language used in this manifesto has been purged of terms that would seem disturbing and violent to them. The flashy anarchism of our liquid times does not arise as a theoretical expression of class struggle, urban revolt or territorial defense, but as the ideology of peaceful confrontation “in the streets and squares” between abstract entities like the “people”, “society” or “the majority” (which their political comrades call the “citizens”) and the evil “elite” or “the one percent”. It is a far-reaching civil society concept, and in no way contradicts its counterpart propagated by the civil society movement, since it is only trying to “instigate popular independence”, that is, it claims that it is trying to occupy the space that it abandoned in order to plunge into the electoral jungle.

OK. Since we have spoken enough about the stew, now we will speak of the cooks, for they are not exactly what you would call virgins when it comes to involvement in the libertarian scene. The authors of Mutual Aid’s manifesto are militants from various backgrounds, as are those who signed it. Mutual Aid is the Spanish version of Platformism, the most retrograde current of anarchism, characterized above all by organizational fetishism, the holy grail of the “program” and the utterly limitless opportunism of its practice. Despite having laid claim to a genealogy that goes all the way back to Bakunin himself, this carnival sideshow was born in Chile some fifteen years ago, dusting off the shopworn theme of the centralized, hierarchical and disciplined “anarchist party” with a single program. An “executive committee” was supposed to be responsible for “awakening” the masses from the outside so that they would unleash forms of “people’s power”, thanks to a “correct” leadership that would not hesitate to become entangled in

¹ The Spanish word *pueblo*, depending on the context, may mean “town” or “village”, or “people” as in the “Iberian people”, or “the working people” or “humble folk” as opposed to the rich [American translator’s note].

political adventures. It is a leftism of Leninist reminiscences, which needs high levels of sectarianism and hallucinations to reinterpret, in a bureaucratic-vanguardist key, a reality that is very far removed from the authoritarian fantasies of the platformists. It is therefore a product of the cultural, political, economic and social disintegration of capitalism, truly hostile to the egalitarian dream, a spinner of tall tales, the natural offscouring of the fragments of the class associated with management that the system has jettisoned in its flight forward.

Platformism is the only current in anarchism that speaks of “power” and justifies without any qualifications the iron necessity of a mediating bureaucracy. The Spanish version is more “lite” and postmodern, as its trendy and upbeat lexicon demonstrates, and its vanguardism is more effectively dissimulated in a “network of militants” and a flexible “roadmap”. Just like its mentors, however, Mutual Aid views disorganization to be the greatest evil and the spontaneists as its greatest enemies. Ignoring all other considerations, all of the earth’s misfortunes are caused by a lack of organization, and, which is even worse, they are due to the absence of a “common program”, an absence that prevents “joint action”. According to Mutual Aid, we have to “put an end to organizational dispersion” and, thanks to an ingenious distinction between partial goals and final goals, we must “develop strategies and tactics that are thought to be practicable”, which will be translated into reformist militantism of the trade union, municipalist, NGO or para-institutional type. In accordance with the prevailing fashion, Mutual Aid postulates the need for a ruling bureaucracy which it calls the “organized people” that will administer “people’s power”. Its members have very good teachers in the anarchist figureheads who betrayed the revolution during the civil war; that is why they have to be in favor of the rehabilitation of the libertarian caste that renounced everything except the victory of their renunciations, engaging in a historiographical revisionism that is necessary for bolstering the image of a mythological past with its miserable features so carefully safeguarded: the party of truth transformed into the truth of the party. The manifesto sends a very clear message: the libertarian social democracy of good intentions has come to stay; the disoriented inhabitants of the ghetto and the riffraff² who criticize organizational fundamentalism [*lo organico*] had better get used to it. Nothing outside the “organization”, everything for the organization! Down with libertarian communism! Long live “economic and political democracy”!

See, for reference, Mark Bray, “Beyond the Ballot Box: Apoyo Mutual in Spain”, ROAR Magazine, May 22, 2015. A sympathetic article about the Mutual Aid group and its Manifesto, including an interview with one of the group’s spokespersons, available online (as of June 2015) at: roarmag.org.

² “Riffruff” is an attempt to translate the Spanish word, “*caspa*”, which can mean “dandruff”, but also something along the lines of “lowlife, scum, trash” [American translator’s note].

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