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There's a Class War on, Dickhead. Pick a Side.

Burn Shit

December 20, 2011

For all postmodernism's rejections of totalising systems, utopian ideologies and socially-constructed binaries, there's always the seduction of the old class line, the red (and/or black) banner of world revolution and the fight against the unitary systems of oppression; the state and capital. There's comfort in the politics of 'us and them'; a sense of belonging, shared identity and even a self-pitying, self-perpetuating victimhood. The conspiracy theory is the zenith of totalising socio-political ideas. They superimpose order and meaning where there is none, give a unified and total explanation for what *is*, a formulaic dual reduction and simplification of all the world's ills into byproducts of our subjugation by secret global cabals; the Illuminati, the Bilderberg Group or the Jews. Power lies with invisible elites, who reveal themselves (to taunt or to leave us some clues?) only through ancient symbols in government-corporate architecture and dollar-bills or coded numerology.

Marxism offers us liberation as a historical inevitability. It's a cosy set-up whereby a dialectic of opposing forces pushes us forth

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towards our communist destiny. The proletariat, as a uniquely revolutionary social category, is fated to usher us into an epoch of social harmony after the resolution of its antagonisms with the bourgeoisie, via world revolution and a transitory stage of socialist dictatorship. Well isn't that lovely? It has the same morbid attraction of organised religion; the promise of a utopian future, of a linear progression of time with a teleological end, of salvation through sacrifice to a cause and devotion to a philosophical abstraction. Marxism has solved all the quandaries. It has all the answers. It has reduced the irreducible multiplicities and struggles into a war between the bourgeois and the proletariat, identifying capital as the unitary source of concentrated power from which all domination emanates. Simple – it's them and us. Eliminate *them*, and all will be well. Eliminate *the base*, collectivise the means of production, and all else – the whole intricate superstructure of power; its techniques, subtleties and flows – will fall into place.

This leads to an arrogance that allows the various Marxist parties to declare themselves 'the vanguards' of the proletariat. Just as a religious sect anoints itself as the key to redemption and deliverance of sin whilst damning and denouncing all the other pious cults to hell, the Marxist parties promote themselves as the keepers of the keys of proletarian revolution, accusing the members of rival Marxist acronyms of being petit-bourgeois, reformist, sectarian, ultra-left, idealist, or even Zionist/Imperialist stooges.

Onwards to the '*transitional phase*', as the Central Committee see to it that the state withers away as quickly as possible. Everything surrendered to the workers' state, the benevolent managers and the administrators, in the promise of communism tomorrow, the next generation, or one after, just as soon as we get around to solving all those 'class antagonisms'. Marxist consequentialism and Hegelian historicism crushed the rebellion at Kronstadt, the Makhnovist army in Ukraine and the workers' councils of Spain, all for the greater good, for a warped utilitarian ethic where everything can (and was) sacrificed for *the* higher ideal, for the realisa-

tion of the Marxist prophecy, for the forward march of history and for the proletarian dictatorship.

Anarchism by contrast embraces a prefigurative politics; one where means is not subordinated to ends and theory is not separated from practice. Direct action by ad hoc groups of individuals takes precedence over struggles mediated by representational hierarchies and rigid organisational structures. But anarchism does not depart too much from the politics of resentment, it does not usually refuse the delineation of the world into two economically-determined camps – 1% vs. 99%, and it has not abandoned the illusory goal of an Eudaimonian paradise on earth – one without anxiety, antagonism and struggle. It still cherishes the end target of *total* social harmony.

Primitivists have tried to convince us that before civilisation, before The Fall, there was a paradise akin to the Elysian wonderland of the naked Adam and Eve of the Western creation myth, in which people and nature were one, in which property and class were anathema and humanity shared in abundance. Zerzan eulogises a lost existence; an unalienated, unmediated and unworried life. Who knows if it ever was? What can an anarchist anthropology offer in this regard? In our current situation, we have to drop this quasi-religious faith in a coming nirvana and regressive nostalgia for an age we have never *lived*. The post-1968 poststructuralist/postmodernist turn apparently leaves us at a kind of apolitical, nihilistic impasse in its rigorous deconstruction of all meta-narratives, identities and ideologies. Rather than seeing this ‘body of knowledge’ as an excuse for inactivity, we should see it as jumpstart. We have to drop this creed of optimism in a remote heaven. Stop romanticising an ever-illusory working class identity. Realise revolution as a perpetual *process*, a constant *becoming* and not an *end* to be achieved *absolutely*. Embrace multiplicity and difference with a politics of desire, not duty and self-sacrifice. “I take my desires for reality because I believe in the reality of my desires.” Some have called this post-anarchism, a new theoretical category

that seems mostly based around circle-jerk sessions in university seminar rooms. But this is what we have always understood anarchism (without a pre-fix) to be. Initially attractive as an alternative to the dreariness of the Marxist left, anarchism was about doing things in the here and now, not waiting in vain for *The Crisis* and pushing papers, waving the flag, listening to speeches for a the approaching revolution or the hotly-anticipated resolution of social strife.

So there's a class war on, dickhead, pick a fucking side. We can reconcile our wishy-washy-posty-moderny tripe with this simple statement anytime we like: When we see police beating rioters, when the young looters are locked up for years while bankers are rewarded handsomely for their thievery, when millionaire governments strip away the livelihoods of vulnerable and disenfranchised people. When benefits that were won by the struggles of the multitude are attacked and we are told, 'we're all in this together', we see no contradiction in fighting on the side of 'the oppressed', but we do so without any illusions. We'll not deny the existence of class, but we'll accept it as something dynamic and unstable, with no fixed or homogenous identity, and certainly not as something defined by your non-ownership of capital or the selling of your labour, since even the modern bank-manager or PR man must sell himself in order to survive. And we'll accept economic oppression as one of a myriad of oppressions, and not the proletariat as some uniform bloc of subdued charity-cases from a Lowry print, reminiscing over the days of a show of hands and a 'we're on strike, lads', the salt-of-the-earth pickets and the struggles of times gone by. Rhizomatic power is pushing in all directions and across class boundaries. There is no centre of power, no simple, neat IWA pyramid, only intersecting practices of power. We can't reduce everything down to the bourgeois/proletarian dialectic. At the same time, we *can* refuse and resist economic oppression and exploitation without falling prey to the dogma of universalising ideology or doctrinaire statements about 'historical agents' and 'proletarian

awakenings.' It can be called taking the side of the workers if you like, or taking the side of the exploited. If there's a hypocrisy in this position then fine, we'll embrace the inconsistency.