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Talking about the Venezuelan situation

interview with the CRA

El Libertario editorial collective

January 2006

We know that you fight in three fronts: a) against pseudo-leftist Chavista groups in power; b) against the anti-Chavez opposition directed by the social democrats and the right; and c) against groups or parties of the traditional left. Could there be a ghetto imposed by the state, the right and its social democrat allies and the traditional left for anarchists in your country, or is a retreat necessary?

Whatever the socio-political situation in any given country is, those who wield or want to wield power will try to curb any symptom of consistent libertarian struggle by building “ghettos” of repression, open or hidden, where to confine it. It is natural for the anarchist militant to confront the intentions of the powers that be, it is a task we must carry on without fail, and above all, without resigning ourselves to the supposedly inevitable condition of being excluded. In no way does the CRA retreat or hide within our shell waiting for better times, and whoever has direct contact with our activities or simply

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reads El Libertario with due attention and frequency, will find enough evidence that we're not a group who stares at its own navel.

We get the impression that the triumph of abstention in the past elections (12/4/05) and the retreat of civil struggle groups towards “no participation” is fertile ground for the forceful imposition of state (Chavista) initiatives. Is this perception true?

We make clear that according to the government's own statistics abstention, understood as the no participation in an electoral process of sectors of the population that could rightfully vote by virtue of being Venezuelan citizens and having the age to vote, has been the norm in all elections in this country since 1989, even during the referendum to recall the president in 2004, when the gangs from the political opposition and the demagogue government made a supreme effort to bring the incredulous masses to the polls. It is an error to qualify as civil struggle groups certain figureheads of the opposition that opportunistically gamble with abstention today, they aren't in any way representative of real social forces in Venezuela. As to the rest, no doubt the Chavez regime tries to impose state control mechanisms everywhere, but being such a corrupt and inept government, blinded by thinking that is building solid popular support turning part of the poorest people into clients dependent on the state's dole, it's going to cost them plenty to make any advances in that contradictory chimera that it calls “21st Century Socialism”, which is nothing but an underdeveloped capitalism of the 19th Century.

Likewise, we think that the Venezuelan anarchists' struggle became trapped in a sea of supposedly anti-imperialist propaganda, promoted by what we at LRN call the Kirchner-Chavez-Morales-Castro axis. Is this true? And if it is, will the Venezuelan anarchist resistance need to double its effort?

We can't understand how that perception exists, anybody who's followed our actions and our thinking will find that we have not been duped by the fallacious "you're with Chavez or else you're with Bush", as we have clearly shown evidence to dismantle this farce. It hasn't been easy to uphold this position that smashes the simplistic schemes that have led the Latin American left from failure to failure for over 80 years, and multiplying our efforts to keep our position has been the order of the day, but our consistency begins to produce results, undoubtedly modest but full of hope that fall within the renewed activity and presence of anarchism in South America, still a minority political expression but one that has made advances between the decade of the 90's and today that are, quantitatively and qualitatively speaking, very important compared to what happened during the five or six previous decades. The challenge is to transform this modest renaissance into the ability to make a significant mark on the process for positive social change sorely needed in our continent.

The Kirchner-Chavez-Morales-Castro axis has several faces: it presents itself as the triumph of parliamentary democracy and conversely, as the standard of struggle against the empire, as mediator of popular social movements and consequently, as the catalyst for civil resistance. What defensive wall do the Venezuelan anarchists have?

You're asking us about our main proposal for action right now. Let's quote a paragraph from our editorial of El Libertario #44:

"We are not, nor do we want to be, contenders for the control of institutionalized power: we are anarchists and we aspire to the disappearance of state power and any other oppressive hierarchical structure. This is not just a profession of faith; our actions here and now mean assuming the commitment to promote and empower the autonomy of any social movement consistent with the ideal. Therefore, we are not interested in

building ‘anarchist social movements’ that would prove as useless to collective progress as the Bolivarian circles or those opposition parties disguised as NGO’s. We bet on social movements that build the dynamics for independent action and organization, based on the widest participation on all levels that will allow the formation of different modes of direct action and self-management away from the state’s control or any other instance of oppression, it is the only way to consolidate spaces of freedom, equality and solidarity that will be the seed and support of the future we struggle for. Our position can be summarized with these words from John Holloway: to change the world without taking power”.

In view of this, does the CRA-El Libertario think a wider effort to spread anarchist ideas is called for?

Considering Venezuelan history, this educational task is a priority, because we have an environment where ignorance of libertarian ideals was almost totally absolute. After 10 years of activity we can point at some successes in this area, but they are hardly the beginning and there’s still much to do, so the spreading of anarchist thought is still a constant problem for those of us in this collective, and we invite all to get to know our work, getting in touch with us, personally or via email, visiting our locals and social clusters where we do our activities – such as the Centro de Estudios Sociales Libertarios of Caracas, and getting information about the CRA and El Libertario.