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On the Way to Work

A Conversation Between Companheiras

G.L.

June 28, 1906

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- Come on, Joanninha, it's time already.
- Here we go, Mariquinhas of my soul, back to this hell... I'm really tired of it. You don't even get to eat, and at home there's nothing to do but go without necessities... it's a life of bitterness!
- Look Joanna: this is not living in the world. It's our own fault, too. I'm sick of talking to you, to you and all the other companheiras, when you don't want to hear...
- Shut up, there's a spy over there.
- I don't care about spies, nor the devil that pays them! Let them go to hell and let them tell anything they like. This isn't life. I'm hoping that the day will come when we see all these hounds run to the pavement.
- You're wrong. Mariquinhas, these dogs are kept by employers.
- And the bosses, who guards them?
- The soldiers, the police...
- That's what the anarchists say...
- Anarchists? By the way, Mariquinhas, the other day I heard a spy say that socialists and anarchists are a bunch of bastards and rioters who only want to make trouble... Is that true?

— And you're going to listen to those dogs? If there were no socialists and anarchists and all were humble and resigned, the bosses could do anything they liked to us, and our misery would be even greater. Everyone works for the bosses: government, judges, soldiers, spies... and the great herd of employees – a bunch of sheep... Against them and for us, there's just ourselves, those of us who have a little knowledge of our rights and dignity. Now, the anarchists are of our number, and they often risk their lives fighting the beast... And so it is that the rich and powerful denounce them and try to get the ignorant to hate them: the bosses and rulers don't want to be bothered in their business; they want to exploit us more easily. Look at the socialists and anarchists you know and look at the bosses: you'll see in a minute that they are on our side. Look at the bourgeois touring the factory, as they stroll about in luxury... at our expense.

— Yes, you're right. Well said the priest, the other day, in the Church, when he gave the sermon: When we die, we will be avenged. We suffer patiently in life, but afterward, we'll see who was in the right... He said such beautiful things! To say there are no such priests!

— Ah! Joanna! Its because of both of these that we are in this state... For you still believe in the priests?! Would you like me to tell you? Priests, monks, bishops, all this scum of the Church, all of them are a bunch of pimps for the bosses. They help the employers to exploit us and live well at the expense of our sweat, selling us, at great expense, their latinorios* and their lies... They say we have to suffer in this life, because they want to live well without working, at our expense, in the company of our bosses. Don't you see how they are friends? Don't you see how pious the rich are? If the pleasure and wealth lead to hell, why don't the priests, the bishops, the pope, try to convert the pious rich to poverty and not the poor?

...

– Yes... But listen, Mariquinhas, we must always respect the priests, because they are God's ministers, and we need to go to the Mass, go to confession ...

– And what good does all this do you? And how can you, believing in God, who, as the believers say, doesn't make mistakes, never deviates, never changes his mind, and is always just, how can you think that your prayers would change his mind? If it is God, then it is as they say: he must always judge in the same way, listening neither to insults nor pleas, never being swayed by flattery or spite. Do you know why there are churches? For the same reason that there are shops: because there are dealers who live on them... And all that are left to steal. The priests, dealers in religion, bolster the Church, which is their livelihood. And the confession? See these spies that our boss to keep watch over us, to tell them our protests, our words of discontent? The priests have done even better: they invented the confessional. That's how they find out our secrets, direct souls, govern houses, snatch up inheritances. They make great cops! ...

– So anarchists and socialists don't go to Church? They have no saints?

– And you trust in the saints? Don't you constantly have to work to earn some bread? If you have to do everything yourself, you must expect everything from yourself... If we trust in our own arms and our own union, we don't need to kneel before any saint, whether of wood or flesh, nor would our work be so hard and so little profitable...

– Do you know something? I also, since I started reading the papers you gave me, which say so many truths, and a little book called "Why We Are Anarchists," I have lost my faith in the saints, and when I go to the Church, I don't even pray: I get to thinking, thinking...

– That all of this is a lie and that the priests are thieves, right?

– I don't say these things, but... Ah! Mariquinhas, it's true: you know what an anarchist said to me and the other companheiras?...

He come to us with good manners, and so, in conversation, he told us that employers, governors, and the ignorant and traitorous workers who help them are all allied against the poor; that the anarchists want the land, machines, houses, railways, all the things used to produce and transport, all to be managed by those who work on them; that in this way, they'll produce much more than today, because there no one will be interested in stopping the work just to sell things for a higher price, and because we wouldn't be working for a boss, but to satisfy consumers, that everyone will work and everyone will consume without the need for money; that today, the factories and farms produce just as long as there are those who buy, and then stop, and are useless, although there are a lot of people left hungry, naked, and homeless; that people are really stupid to put up with this; that women have the same rights as men and will belong to themselves... That we need to be united and resolute! And other things. I was eager to learn more ...

— And you thought you didn't know anything about anarchists!... But here is the prison. Let's talk again another time.