

Views & Comments Number 16, August 1956

Libertarian League

August 1956

Contents

<i>Who is Crazy? by GWR</i>	3
<i>LIBERTARIAN FORUM</i>	3
<i>What We Stand For</i>	3
<i>Lessons From Collective Settlements in Israel by Joseph Spivak</i>	4
Organized Settlements	4
The Moshway Huovdim	5
What Can We Anarchists Learn from These Experiments?	5
<i>Why...? Yes... Why?... by Sebastian Faure</i>	7
<i>Constructive Aspects of a Free Society</i>	8
<i>Bulgaria</i>	9
<i>Quotation</i>	10
<i>Uruguay</i>	10
<i>Quotation</i>	10
<i>Latin American Student Struggles</i>	11
<i>Argentina: “La Protesta” Protests The Suppression of “La Protesta”</i>	12
<i>What? Anarchists quoting Nietzsche?</i>	12
<i>Freedom and Arrogance by Guillermo</i>	13

Views & Comments Number Sixteen, August 1956
Published by The Libertarian League
813 Broadway, New York 3, N.Y.
Box 949, 920 Third Avenue, Seattle 4, Wash.

Who is Crazy? by GWR

The internal contradictions of capitalism are very well illustrated in the present economic situation of Greece.

A Reuters report from Athens published in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* on June 5 points out that, on the basis of statistics recently released by the Greek government, one out of every three Greeks is living at or below the bare subsistence level. The number of officially registered destitutes in the last quarter of 1955 had increased by 219,787 over the third quarter of the same year.

And yet, by March, 1955 gross national production had increased 72% from the 1948 figure and exports had risen from \$89,800,000 in 1948 to \$210,900,000 in 1955.

How to reconcile this rising production with increasing unemployment and pauperism? The best explanation the Greek minister of social welfare, Madame Lina Tsaldaris, can offer (or dares to offer, more likely) is that the people are getting poorer "because the country's social progress is being undermined by an excess of manpower."

And yet in the next breath, she says that the country's industry and agriculture are sadly underdeveloped. Why then the idle workers? Or isn't work the way to develop a country?

The answer, of course, in Greece as elsewhere, is the price system. An unjust economic system is making the rich richer and poor poorer. Isn't it the same here? Many top executives last year received salaries of from \$700,000 on up, and other parasites live off their unearned income without even the pretense of a job.

LIBERTARIAN FORUM

ROUND TABLE YOUTH DISCUSSIONS
Every Friday at 8
LIBERTARIAN CENTER
813 Broadway (between 11th & 12th Sts.)
New York City

What We Stand For

Two great power blocs struggle for world domination. Neither of these represents the true interests and welfare of Humanity. Their conflict threatens mankind with atomic destruction. Underlying both of these blocs are institutions that breed exploitation, inequality and oppression.

Without trying to legislate for the future we feel that we can indicate the general lines along which a solution to these problems can be found.

The exploitative societies of today must be replaced by a new libertarian world which will proclaim—Equal freedom for all in a free socialist society. "Freedom" without socialism leads to privilege and injustice; "Socialism" without freedom is totalitarian.

The monopoly of power which is the state must be replaced by a world-wide federation of free communities, labor councils and/or co-operatives operating according to the principles of free agreement. The government of men must be replaced by a functional society based on the administration of things.

Centralism, which means regimentation from the top down, must be replaced by federalism, which means co-operation from the bottom up.

THE LIBERTARIAN LEAGUE will not accept the old socio-political clichés, but will boldly explore new roads while examining anew the old movements, drawing from them all, that which time and experience has proven to be valid.

Lessons From Collective Settlements in Israel by Joseph Spivak

For hundreds of years the anarchists' ideal of a system of society without any central authority, one based on voluntary cooperation, has been preached; but never did we have an opportunity to observe such a system in real practice. Then the Zionists came and provided us with an experiment in which thousands of persons of the same ideology, with no funds of their own, decided to build a country for themselves. These people chose a form of organization based on free voluntary cooperation, with no central authority; equal work and equal rewards for all. They started with land and a little equipment given them by the Jewish Agency on a forty-nine-year payment plan.

Now that this undertaking has been in operation for almost half a century we should be in a position to judge how successful this experiment is and what faults, if any, we can find from the Anarchist point of view.

Organized Settlements

The importance of the experiments in Israel is the more valuable to us for the reason that not all the settlers agreed on the same form of organization. In fact, there are four types of settlements. For our discussion, however, we shall describe the two main types, the Kibutzim and the Moshway Huovdim.

In the Kibutzim, the life of the settlement is organized on a communistic basis (not to be confused with Bolshevik Communism). Each member is assigned a share of labor, and every member receives the same compensation. They get the same quarters, the same food and the same amount of spending money. There is no difference between the dish-washer and the general manager.

The children in the Kibutzim are brought up by the community. As soon as a child is only a few weeks old, it is taken to an infant's nursery where it is cared for by special women assigned to that type of work. When the children grow up each is assigned to a class of his own age group. At the age of eight a child begins to learn practical work in the field for about an hour a day. As the child gets older the work period is increased. There were in Israel in 1953 (I spent ten weeks there at that time) 220 Kibutzim with a membership of 60,000. All these settlements are prosperous. Some of them, especially the older ones, are very rich and worth millions of Israeli pounds. Others, the younger ones, are not so rich, but nevertheless prosperous.

The Moshway Huovdim

This form of settlement is set up on an individual basis, supplemented by cooperative work where common problems are involved. Each member receives a plot of land, machinery, a horse and other implements necessary for farm work. This becomes his own, and he has to pay for it within a period of 49 years. The member is responsible to no one for his work, but to himself. He may work hard if he so chooses, or he may be lazy; no one can censure him. No one is allowed to hire outside help, and thus become an employer. Should a member decide to sell his land, he may do so, but the community will have to decide whether the buyer is a desirable member, the price that the seller may charge for the land he is selling, taking into consideration any and all improvements the seller may have made on the lands in the house he has built, etc. Everything will be considered but no profiteering will be permitted.

The group has a cooperative warehouse. All products produced are sold cooperatively, and all products needed for work, production and consumption, are bought cooperatively. They have many social institutions, such as schools, auditoriums for lectures, gatherings, etc. They have a communal theatre, library and other things needed in a civilized modern community.

Each member has his own home which he can build in any style he wishes. In other words, unlike the Kibutzim—where everything is exactly the same, the same houses, the same food, the same clothing; here the accent is on the individual taste, every member living his life his own way, according to his own wishes and desires.

What Can We Anarchists Learn from These Experiments?

The first question that interests us is: why is it that hundreds of communes that were at different times organized in this country fail while these experiments in Israel proved successful? My answer is this:

1. The most important requisite to collective living is that those who are a part of the venture must have the same ideal, and that they all work for that ideal.
2. Collective living can succeed only when it is not surrounded by a capitalistic atmosphere. Collective living, at least at the start, is very hard; many sacrifices must be made and when the members are surrounded by people leading a rich life, and possessing riches, it is difficult for members of communal settlements to possess the courage and the idealism necessary for the sacrifices. It becomes trying for the individual.
3. The members of such a group must be poor before they start such an adventure. When one has money or when one is used to earning much money he will never be happy in a communal undertaking, where suffering is to be expected before success is attained.
4. It is self-evident that no hired labor and no exploitation of labor can be permitted in a commune. Each one must be willing to work hard and should expect very little reward at the start, at least until the undertaking becomes a success.

All these conditions prevailed in the settlements of the Zionists when they started their experiment, and they succeeded. There is another lesson that for us Anarchists is very important. In this Israeli experiment we find that there are two distinct forms of organization: Communism

vs. Individualism. Which of these types is nearer to our ideal? Which of these groups are theoretically more anarchistic? Both were organized on anarchistic principles and yet there is quite a difference in the results, as I will try to prove. First let us see what the aim of anarchism is. The aim is to create a system where the individual will be free and get the most that a civilized form of life can offer, with all the comforts that one can create by his own labor without the exploitation of his fellow men. Now let us examine closely which of these groups have attained these objectives to a higher degree.

In the Kibutzim everyone is theoretically free; there are no dictators, no one takes advantage of another. As I stated above, the general manager gets no more reward for his work than does the dish washer. Yet, it is a known fact that in a commune the individual is lost. There is no exploitation by a Boss, by a capitalist. But real life proves that the Community is just as good an exploiter as the private capitalist. The difference is that the worker in a private capitalistic factory is forced to be exploited, while in a communal organization the exploitation is done on an ideal basis; but the individual is exploited nevertheless. In the Kibutzim therefore, we find that although the Kibutz is successful and gets ever richer, the member gets very little out of it. Life in the Kibutz as I found it in 1949 and in 1953, was very primitive. Even in some of the older Kibutzim that had already accumulated great wealth, even there the individual member lived in a cottage of a single room with no modern improvements. There was a public wash room and public lavatories. All ate in a communal dining room, some of them very primitive indeed. All the best food that they produced went to market, while the members very seldom were given eggs or meat at the table. The clothing consists for the most part of work clothes only. A suit of clothes is only to go to the city, or if it is received as a gift from their American friends. Very often a few men or women share the use of a coat or other warm garment to go to the city or to visit. And even to go to the city is not easy. Each member receives a limited amount of money for personal use. Such is the life in the Kibutz, and if you should ask how a free individual can take it, the answer is it is a sacrifice for the ideal, for the Community.

In the Moshway Huovdim, however, the situation is entirely different. There each one is on his own. He can build a house of any style he likes (in the Kibutzim all cottages must be alike). If one wishes to work hard and produce more he can enrich his personal life by buying the most modern things life can offer. "And we find that in the Moshway Huovdim settlements the members have the most modern homes, equipped with every modern equipment, such as refrigerators, washing machines, electric dishwashers and whatnot. They have beautiful gardens, lovely cars. They work for themselves, and for their own benefit. This I believe is the aim of a free individual—to make the individual happy.

Another fact that I observed was that the Kibutzim, trying to build up their communities, in a course of time acquire a capitalistic psychology; they acquire an appetite for the accumulation of wealth, and seek to expand their undertakings. And so, quite a number of old, rich Kibutzim began to expand by manufacturing various commercial products. Naturally, for such undertakings they had to employ wage labor. At the time I was there in 1953 there was even a labor strike. Of course, this is not anarchism and I do not blame anarchism for it. However, this could not happen in an individual form of settlement. In the individual type of settlement, while one may accumulate wealth, he will use his wealth to make his own personal life more pleasant and more comfortable, and this is and should be our aim.

Why...? Yes... Why?... by Sebastian Faure

Human hunger is not satisfied although the orchards are laden with fruit and the market stalls in the town are piled high with foodstuffs. Why doesn't the hungry person eat? WHY? Because his conscience tells him that this fruit and these foodstuffs are not his, and that it would be wrong for him to take them (moral restraints); or perhaps it is fear of the police, the magistrates, and imprisonment (material restraint).

The young man in the armed forces feels the repressiveness of the law that keeps him there, but in spite of this he goes through with his service. WHY? Because he has been taught that every healthy young man should learn to be a soldier for the defense and for the glory of his country (moral restraint); or perhaps it is because he fears the severity of the military code towards all who refuse to submit to it (material restraint).

Two young people are seized by a wild desire to possess each other but resist their instincts and reject this happiness. WHY? Because in spite of their natural passionate impulses they imagine that it would be dishonorable to do so outside of marriage (moral restraint); or because their parents refuse their permission and are able to keep them apart (material restraint).

WHY DOES PROSTITUTION EXIST? Because certain poor creatures sell their bodies through necessity or for material gains.

WHY DOES JEALOUSY EXIST? Because the concepts of permanence, obligation, exclusiveness, private property and contract have been introduced into affairs of the heart.

WHY DOES HYPOCRISY EXIST? Because we feel forced to hide those of our acts and sentiments that appear to contradict the established rules or that are not acceptable to public opinion.

WHY DOES GREED EXIST? Because money is needed to acquire both necessities and luxuries; because riches are respected while poverty is looked down upon.

WHY IS WAR POSSIBLE? Because people allow themselves to be instilled with hatred and obey their leaders who drive them to murder one another.

WHY DO PRISONS EXIST? Because long pent-up passions must be satisfied at any price, even though this leads to murder. It is the revenge of outraged nature.

WHY WILL A WHOLE PEOPLE bow down before a crowned tyrant or a political or military adventurer? Because the stupid respect for brute force has so become a part of their consciousness that it is felt every time a policeman or other uniformed representative of the State is seen.

I could multiply these question marks indefinitely, call the dead to witness and interrogate the living, asking them all why they have suffered as they have! They would all answer with a "because" based on some scruple or some duty, on some obligation or need, or on some form of moral or material servitude. I defy anyone to show me a single social ill that does not flow from some law, some prejudice, some inequality or some moral or material restraint. All these ills are due to the fact that people do not behave as they would like to; yielding to these unnatural restraints, they live and act against their own interests and their own desires.

Today's society resembles an immense dungeon. All who live in it are laden with the chains of their troubles and frustrations. It is as though they were enclosed in one of those torture boxes of the inquisition. The whole body is held firmly while various parts of the apparatus are tightened in turn, squeezing first one part of the victim and then another. He who submits willingly to the apparatus of torment becomes himself a part of the instrument of torture.

Is this not an accurate picture of the authoritarian society under which we live?

Constructive Aspects of a Free Society

(Editorial note: This article, from “Acción Libertaria,” organ of the Libertarian Federation of Argentina, is addressed to those who think that anarchism is weakest in the positive sense—on how to realize a society without economic privilege and without a State.)

The constructive aspects of a free society were the subject of special attention by our forerunners—theoreticians and propagandists at all times. While animated by great idealistic faith in the spontaneous creative capacity of the people to free themselves from all slavery, they also advanced definite ways of dealing with the crucial problems raised by a social revolution. All of them stressed the necessity for the greatest possible preparation of the people BEFORE a revolution, so they would know how to proceed in order to bring the revolution to a successful conclusion.

Libertarians formulated the basic structure of the economic organizations which will take over production and distribution, the organs of relation and coordination and all the other functional bodies indispensable to a free society. The works of Kropotkin, notably “The Conquest of Bread” and “Fields, Factories and Workshops,” the articles of Malatesta in “Umanita Nova” (the New Humanity) and, much later, many specialized works about the economic and social forms of a libertarian society appeared in France, Spain, Argentina and other countries; all give eloquent examples of the concern of our movement with constructive problems.

It would be pretentious and contrary to the spirit of our movement to construct a single rigid scheme, universally applicable to all situations. Ours is a pluralistic, flexible conception. The network of voluntary organizations and societies must be as wide and varied as society itself, and must accurately reflect its manifold interactions. The libertarian thinkers stressed the necessity for the people in each locality and in every department of social life, to take into account the special conditions and act accordingly. Existing organizations will re-adopt themselves along libertarian lines and new organizations reflecting new needs will regenerate society.

The new society, while providing the greatest freedom to all, will not confuse free cooperation with chaos; nor should free experimentation mean attempts to re-install old and new systems of exploitation and accumulation of privileges. Furthermore, there is an irreconcilable contradiction between coordination imposed by technique, and authoritarian centralization and monopoly; between effective federalism from below and the state with its inevitable centralization from the top.

Syndicates, cooperatives, councils, factory and job committees, collectives, industrial and agricultural federations, municipal or communal councils, exchange and coordinating bodies, making up a network corresponding to productive and geographical needs, can embrace and construct the most complex social organism and develop better and better forms of life, in line with their own expanding experience.

Libertarian Socialism admits of various organizational forms, methods of distribution and systems of exchange provided that no one exploits the other. Wherever Libertarian Socialism was tried it proved its viability and capacity for practical realization. It has earned the right to present to the people disillusioned with the disasters of state rule, the libertarian solution. Various notable experiments have been made and continue to be made in direct management by popular associations. The Makhno movement in the Ukraine was in marked contrast to Bolshevik despotism in the first years of the Russian Revolution; in the high development of the Hungarian Commune; in the Palestinian Kibutzim, inspired by the fecund principle of mutual aid, and of

course in Spain, where the constructive efficiency of Libertarian Socialism reached its highest development. In all of these cases it proves the capacity of the people to live without coercive institutions, in wide solidarity, overcoming stupendous obstacles and making prodigious strides to the new society. In all these cases it proves that the intervention of the state had disastrous consequences.

Bulgaria

(Editorial note: One of our pamphlets, “Bulgaria, A New Spain,” tells how the usurpers of the Russian revolution tried to wipe out the Bulgarian anarchist movement by persecuting our comrades. The following communication from the National Confederation of Labor of Bulgaria in exile shows that the rulers have failed. Though driven underground, the movement persists, has connections with the outside and carries on the battle for freedom.)

Through our special connections with our movement in the interior, we solicited information about the constructive work of the regime in the field of industrialization, its positive aspects and its defects. Here is the answer”

“...we have not the least desire to speak to you about the ‘great constructive projects’ in our country. The continual propaganda about this question is repugnant to us. Read the same papers we do and you will get a full account of them. We can only answer that similar projects are possible everywhere when the needs of the people are not considered and then a whole population is condemned to pay the price in terms of misery and slavery for generations.

“We believe that it would be much more interesting to tell you about the true nature of the ‘great advantages’ and ‘benefits’ that the workers who build these great projects (which at first sight seem so marvelous), are supposed to enjoy. So here are some examples.

“Before the installation of the new slavery, the employees received three to seven times more than they do today, calculating according to the actual prices of commodities now. Before, certain categories of workers got a month vacation, a house and electricity free, a pair of boots and work clothes free, free medical attention and medicine (for those insured and their families). For employees whose wages are much lower, one suit a year is given and an overcoat every three years. The six hour day for certain types of work was strictly observed, and for night and Sunday work overtime was paid. All the workers enjoyed Saturdays off.

“Came the ‘communist’ slave drivers, vacations were reduced from thirty to twenty days, with travel allowance, then further reduced to fourteen days, with no travel allowance and no free medical care. All the other hard-won benefits for which the workers fought so valiantly were abolished as ‘bourgeois prejudices.’ You are free, therefore, to judge for yourselves the kind of ‘benefits’ that were granted to the workers by the new oligarchy that rules over our country.

“The material conditions of the workers grows progressively worse. We are grieved that the workers of the west, our brothers, do not see the situation with sufficient clarity. Do they not see the peril which this regime holds for all of humanity? Our sufferings should serve as a lesson to the world working class. We hope that our sufferings will spur your energy to fight against tyranny. The bitterness of the workers has reached the breaking point and they await only the opportune moment to rebel—they are in an explosive mood.”

Quotation

“The only protection which honest people need is protection against that vast Society for the Creation of Theft which is euphemistically designated as the state.”

—Benjamin R. Tucker

Uruguay

The Uruguayan Anarchist monthly, VOLUNTAD, carries an extensive report of the national conference just concluded in Montevideo. Here are some of the highlights.

The conference was called by various unaffiliated groups for the purpose of preparing the basis for a Libertarian Federation of Uruguay to be formed six months hence. The deliberations took four whole days and five night sessions were held. It was attended by 200 people consisting of students, workers, professionals and other militants from all over the country. Representatives of the Argentine Libertarian federation were present and greetings from all over Latin America and other parts of the world were sent.

After a searching discussion of the shortcomings of the movement, the conference took up the problem of reorganizing and strengthening the movement as an effective force in combating the authoritarian tendencies in the social and economic life of the country.

A constructive spirit animated the gathering. The delegates were acutely aware of the fact that our ideas are misunderstood and distorted. Too many people think that we are mere visionaries, that we are against everything and for nothing.

Consequently the conference tried to find practical answers to such questions as how to build producers' and consumers' cooperatives and other popular organizations functioning independently of the State, how to infuse the libertarian spirit into existing cultural organizations and cooperative bodies and how to establish libraries, student groups, clubs and the like.

The problem of reviving the libertarian and direct action tendencies of the Uruguayan labor movement was given close attention.

A constructive program was worked out to orientate the labor movement from state welfarism and toward libertarian objectives. The role of Libertarians in labor unions, the study of technical processes and administrative problems in preparation for workers' control of industry, and the positive intervention of the workers in the management of industry were among the questions taken up.

In dealing with the international situation the assemblage reaffirmed its militant anti-war position, condemned both imperialist war-blocs, pledged its solidarity with the struggles of the colonial peoples, and called upon the workers to play an independent role in world affairs.

Inspired by the fruitful work of the conference, the participants went back to their localities determined to translate their decisions into deeds.

Quotation

“To be governed, in the words of Proudhon, is to be conscripted, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, exhausted, hoaxed and robbed; then, upon the slightest resistance, at the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, annoyed, hunted down, pulled about,

beaten, disarmed, bound, imprisoned, shot, judged, condemned, banished, sacrificed, sold, betrayed and, to crown all, ridiculed, derided, outraged, dishonored.”

—quoted from FREEDOM

Latin American Student Struggles

Those Latin American countries where even a few democratic liberties are still respected, could be counted on the fingers of one hand—with fingers to spare. The political and social panorama is truly disheartening in this continent plagued by dictatorships, most of which have their base in the barracks.

Odría, Pérez Jiménez, Rojas Pinilla, Castillo Armas, Trujillo, Somoza and Batista are outstanding examples of this. Having reached power through the army they have been able to maintain themselves thanks to the bloody repression of every popular movement and the fraudulent support of labor front type unions, made-to-order elections, a servile press and radio, and interference in the schools, universities and other institutions, domination over which is continually sought by these Twentieth Century tyrannies.

In the last 50 years the Latin American students' movement has been in the vanguard of numerous struggles for individual and collective liberties. These students have placed the struggle for basic social concepts above their demands for the improvement of conditions for themselves.

They have been unable to accept the idea of a cloistered university, set apart from the problems and events of the world they live in. Since a major problem of our times revolves around the right to speak out, the voice of rebellion against tyranny has often found expression among the students of the universities.

On the one hand has been the defense of basic human rights, wherein the anti-dictatorial struggle has taken an ever more marked libertarian direction. On the other hand there has been the fight against repeated attempts of the governments to weaken the autonomy of the universities in order to prevent these centers of learning from operating independently and militantly in social matters.

This note was not intended to be a simple ideological synthesis, so we shall mention a few concrete instances of recent struggles of the university students of the continent against the brass-hat dictators.

In VENEZUELA, Pérez Jiménez has set up what is probably the most brutal of the present dictatorships. The students have not ceased to combat him from the underground. A few weeks ago, the students of the Fermin Toro Lyceum in Caracas organized a demonstration of protest against what they considered to be unfavorable policies in the matter of examinations. The troops of the dictator clashed with the demonstrators, killing a number of the mostly adolescent girls.

In GUATEMALA, Castillo Armas came to power thanks to the direct intervention of Yankee imperialism. All of the supporters of the previous regime are either in prison or in exile. The Association of University Students has not, however, ceased its demands for the restoration of public liberties and the abolition of the laws “for the defense of democracy and against communism,” which is the simple formula used by these petty dictators to crush popular protests. The Law Students' Center, an affiliate of the Association, has kept up a continual protest at great risk to the security and lives of its members.

In CUBA, “Sergeant” Batista has recently used the police against those students working for the autonomy of the universities, and every few months there is a round-up of militant students. The Cuban comrades are standing firm in their opposition to the dictatorship and in their defense of academic freedom.

In PARAGUAY, following the strong measures taken against hundreds of Paraguayan students, the dictator Stroessner has continued a policy of persecution and imprisonment of the members of the Paraguayan University Federation and its affiliated groups. A notable facet of this case has been the international student solidarity which has ignored national boundaries to support fellow students opposing a regime that is a local political heir of Peron and that applies the same liberticide policies.

In EL SALVADOR and in COLOMBIA, the students have also come out into the streets to demonstrate for academic freedom and for liberty, shedding their young blood in virile protests against the tyrants Velazco Ibarra and Rojas Pinilla.

We do not believe that the struggles of these students is in vain. Through their blood and sacrifice, the peoples of Latin America will yet build for themselves a better future along Libertarian lines—the only way to assure a stable life of Liberty and Justice.

Translated from “Voluntad”

Montevideo May, 1956

Argentina: “La Protesta” Protests The Suppression of “La Protesta”

The “democratic” politicians and army officers who seized power following the overthrow of the Peron dictatorship made limitless promises concerning the freedom of the press, assemblage and all public expression.

The powerful syndicates of the Argentine Regional Federation of Labor (F.O.R.A.), which had spent the totalitarian interlude as an active underground opposition, were able once again to come into the open, and to resume regular publication of its newspaper “La Protesta.”

Recently however, in the face of a rising revolutionary labor movement, with major strikes following one upon the other, the Government ordered the suspension of “La Protesta,” seized the print shop and imprisoned one of the editors.

Almost without delay, “La Protesta” has reappeared voicing its protest against its own suppression and shouting its defiance of the Authorities. It is pointed out that in the 59 years since the paper’s founding it has been suspended many times by both dictatorial and “democratic” governments, thanks to its policy of revolutionary intransigence, which it still has every intention of continuing.

The latest cry of defiance announces: “La Protesta has been closed down, but La Protesta will continue to appear on the streets with or without its print shop, with or without permission. This is our determination and the wish of our supporters.”

What? Anarchists quoting Nietzsche?

The State! Whatever the State saith is a lie; whatever it hath is theft; all is counterfeit in it, the gnawing, sanguinary, insatiate monster. It even bites with stolen teeth. Its very bowels are counterfeit.

Whosoever will be free must make himself free; freedom is no fairy's gift to fall into any man's lap.

Freedom and Arrogance by Guillermo

(translated from "La Protesta" June 1956)

Many people hold hazy and confused ideas concerning the relationship between the struggle for economic demands and the general yearning for human freedom. This confusion gives rise to two opposite and equally incorrect conclusions.

One is the concept that every moral or spiritual improvement is of necessity mechanically dependent on material betterment. Following this line one is led to believe that man's moral stature is necessarily and automatically raised when the material conditions of his life improve. Hence it is believed that the struggle for human freedom' should be fought exclusively as a struggle for economic freedom: With the abolition of private property to be replaced by collective production as the maximum goal and as immediate objectives, the increase of wages, improved health, better housing, etc.

However, many experiences—including those under Peron in Argentina—would appear to indicate the contrary. A betterment of the material conditions of existence not only does not imply a general raising of human ethical values, but in many cases appears to lead to their decline—to greater conformity and to the acceptance of dictatorship, to the abandonment of all interests excepting the purely biological satisfactions.

On the other hand, we find an equally false line of reasoning, which affirms that the struggle for liberty and greater human dignity has nothing to do with the struggle for bread, for better material conditions of life. This leads to an arrogant sort of idealism devoid of human warmth, according to which liberty is the privilege of a few individuals who have discovered it on their own, and that is something quite apart from the economic situation. Its propagation can only be accomplished through a sort of emotional contagion, compared to which material demands seem to be prosaic deviations of little value. This road leads to the bitter and pedantic esotericism into which have fallen many who call themselves anarchists.

The first concept, according to which liberty and human dignity are the automatic results of changing economic conditions, is the position of historical materialism, which is much less scientific and much more utopian than the Marxists believe.

But today we wish to examine the opposite position, according to which the moral improvement of humanity is absolutely independent of the material conditions of life. The word BREAD is symbolic. It does not simply mean "food." It represents the need for a change in the system of life that characterizes modern society. This system compels the major part of humanity to play an economic role: it converts communities into machines of production, and individuals into impersonal cogs; in short it makes of man—a thing. The development of all that is human in man, his possibilities of evolution, the development of his initiative, and the conscious creative striving for freedom, are all blocked in this sort of environment.

Even the individual possibilities of liberation are conditioned in their forms and in their orientation by the limitations of society as a whole. They are forced into obligatory introversion, towards twisted forms of expression and bitter isolation. Although they may express the creative

potentialities of life, they also show the effects of the deforming, repressive pressure of modern life and its peculiar system of values.

For one who does not see the over-all picture it may appear true that there is no solution but to abandon all considerations of a material nature, concentrate on self-improvement, relying exclusively on one's spiritual irradiation in personal contacts and on one's own esthetic effusion. With such an attitude one sees only trees—but misses the woods.

Today we live in a culture that is inadequate for creative living and which hinders man's further development. It is not a matter of biological limitations, mental deficiency or lack of sensitivity. Those shortcomings do exist, not as individual accidents but as effects of our way of life. Our culture is based on material economic values where both man and his environment are concerned. This was not always so, but it is today.

Because of its set-up, this culture gives man an economic function and prevents him from living otherwise. His environment consists of certain modes of production, labor, distribution, property rights, etc. This so involves and enmeshes his life the majority find it impossible to free themselves individually. Why, then, not attack the system as a whole? Why not seek a way of life where economics would be the means and not the end? But how can this be done without proposing, among other things, a different form of economic organization?

If it appears necessary one may discuss the ethical value and practical efficiency of the methods used so far in attempts to achieve these goals: the class struggle, syndicated action, etc. But these are problems that do not affect the basic idea: that the struggle for bread is not a simple demand for food, but is one of the forms of the struggle for human liberty.

Understood in this light, the pursuit of economic objectives no longer seems vulgar and prosaic. All those who feel most deeply the ideals of liberty, those who are most capable of emotion, those who are most creative in the fields of art and learning, must enter into the soul of all humanity, sympathizing with the yearnings of all, knowing the inherent importance of the most elementary struggles, and knowing that the least partakes somewhat of greatness. Those who are free cannot be arrogant.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Libertarian League
Views & Comments Number 16, August 1956
August 1956

Scanned from original
Libertarian League publisher

usa.anarchistlibraries.net