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Nestor Makhno

Anarchism and Our Times

September 1925

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Anarchism is not merely a doctrine that deals with the social aspect of human life, in the narrow meaning with which the term is invested in political dictionaries and, at meetings, by our propagandist speakers: anarchism is also the study of human life in general.

Over the course of the elaboration of its overall world picture, anarchism has set itself a very specific task: to encompass the world in its entirety, sweeping aside all manner of obstacles, present and yet to come, which might be posed by bourgeois capitalist science and technology, with the aim of providing humanity with the most exhaustive possible explanation of existence in this world and of making the best possible fist of all the problems which may confront it. This approach should help humanity to develop consciousness of the anarchism that is, as far as I know, naturally inherent in us to the extent that humanity is continually being faced with partial manifestations thereof.

It is only on the basis of the will of the individual that anarchist teachings can be embodied in real life and clear a path that will help humanity to banish all spirit of submission from its bosom.

Anarchism knows no bounds to its development.

Anarchism acknowledges no banks within which it might be confined and fixed.

Anarchism, like human existence generally, has no definitive formulas for its aspirations and objectives.

As I see it, the right of every person to unlimited freedom, as defined by the theoretical postulates of anarchism, are only a means by which anarchism can achieve its more or less complete expression, whilst continuing to develop. And only here anarchism becomes clear for each of us: having banished from humanity that spirit of submission that has been artificially instilled in it, anarchism thereafter becomes the leading idea for the human masses on their march towards the attainment of all their goals.

Theoretically, anarchism in our day is still regarded as weak, badly developed and even - some would say - often interpreted wrongly in many respects. However, its exponents - they say - have plenty to say about it: many are constantly prattling about it, militating actively and sometimes complaining of its lack of success (I imagine, in this last instance, that this attitude is prompted by the failure to devise, through research, the social wherewithal vital to anarchism if it is to gain a foothold in contemporary society...).

In reality, wherever human life is to be found, anarchism is alive. On the other hand, it becomes accessible to the individual only where it boasts propagandists and militants, who have honestly and entirely severed their connections with the slave mentality of our age, something, by the way, that brings savage persecution down upon their heads. Such militants aspire to serve their beliefs unselfishly, without fear of uncovering unsuspected aspects in the course of their development, the better to digest them as they proceed, if need be, and in this way they pave the way for the success of the anarchist spirit over the spirit of submission.

Two theses arise out of the above:

- the first is that anarchism assumes a variety expressions and forms, whilst retaining a perfect integrity in its essentials;

- the second is that anarchism is inherently revolutionary and can adopt only revolutionary modes of action in the struggle against its oppressors.

In the course of its revolutionary struggle, anarchism not merely overthrows governments and discards their laws, but also sets about the society that spawned their values, their "mores" and their "morality," which is what makes it increasingly known and understood by the oppressed sectors of humanity.

All of which inclines us to the firm belief that anarchism in our time can no longer remain walled up inside the narrow parameters of a marginal thinking to which only a few tiny groups operating in isolation subscribe. The natural influence of anarchism on the psyche of the human masses in struggle is all too apparent. But if the influence of anarchism is to be assimilated by the masses in a conscious fashion, anarchism must henceforth arm itself with new approaches and embark on the path of social action now, in our times.