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Ricardo Mella
Collectivism
1891

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Collectivism

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Gone are the days when socialist sentimentality expected everything from the mother country and demanded everything of her. Gone are the days when the revolution was just a feeling, and declaimed comically against individualism face to face with the supreme power of the state or of society, its client. Gone are the days when socialism and revolution had no philosophy but that of the heart, no principle of right and justice but that of universal love.

All these concepts, all these ideas are only among us as a remnant of what was never to be, as a residue pointing to our remote origin.

Today, the Revolution has its rational philosophy, its principle of right and its justice. It has fully entered the period of maturity and it is useless to look back. Man no longer expects from society what he should not and cannot expect. Society is not for him a loving mother bound by duty to meet all your needs. He knows that all that depends on his own activity and the activity of those who wish to associate with him. Freedom is enough under conditions of equality, in order to be able to dispense with a being that determines his will alone, society. This is its work and its work is

necessary to meet individual deficiencies. There is no mother of the man who comes: this concept died with the idea of the state, and instead there remains only the free individual to make free societies as well.

Man has the right to satisfy all his needs, but to satisfy them for himself, through the judicious use of all his strength and attitudes, through his work. From himself, then, he awaits this satisfaction, not from society or the state. If he is not self-sufficient, he can associate, seeking to supplement his insufficiencies within free associations for cooperation, credit, currency, and security. That is all. Freedom, freedom forever!

If individualism has thrown man into violence and lack of solidarity, communism pushes him to guardianship, self-denial and makes him a mere instrument of society or the state, two identical things with different names.

In the name of freedom we reject communism! In the name of solidarity we reject individualism! Such is our view.

Freedom and solidarity are sufficient to solve the problem. Hence the collectivist school.

We know that collectivism is not identical in every part. We are aware that there are authoritarian schools that support an economic idea similar to ours and are even baptized with the same name. But this matters little. Ideas and more ideas are needed, and the names are simply a matter of convention. Let us agree to call our solution to the problem of property collectivism because it is neither communist nor individualistic. That is all.

Let us explain our ideas and move on.

No doubt there are in the background of individualism and communism two irrefutable principles. The man is absolute master of his work. Humanity is the sovereign of all the means of production that nature contains. Give humanity and man what is their due and you have collectivism.

Man is born with the power to produce and nature is expected to provide the means to carry on business. Leave man free to apply

his powers and, in fairness, you have no more to do. Whatever the world holds the man can use for the job. The right is universal, and belongs to all. Nobody can therefore seize the smallest part of that common fund, which costs nothing and no one creates. By virtue of what right or what law shall man be bound to do more? How will he be forced to make his individual work also become part of the common fund? Leave him free. He owns his work, has the property in the product and only by his free will can he donate or not donate to the society. If the former, it will be a very free and spontaneous act of his being. If the latter, it will be by an unquestionable right and unlimited sovereignty. Overstep these limits and freedom will be destroyed.

This is why we affirm the community of all the means of production and doubly affirm the right of ownership and possession of individual and collective product for the individual and the community, the full, absolute right to the product of labor.

Place all men in equal economic conditions, by providing all with the means of production, and you have the principle of justice. Render to all men the freedom to dispose, as best fits them, their feelings, their thoughts and their works and you will have justice in all its magnificent fullness. So says collectivism; so says anarchy.

Do not ask us how it is to determine the product of the work of each, because it would be a foolish question. A state of freedom not fit formulas determined a priori. The diversity of work produces diverse solutions. Liberty guarantees them. In one work [the solution] will be determined by the individual himself. In another, it will be exchange and contract that determine it. In yet another, it will be association, freely governed and freely agreed upon.