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a few notes on civil anarchism
2012

Posted on Thursday, May 24th, 2012 on http://325.nostate.net/?p=5371
Retrieved on May 28, 2009 from http://325.nostate.net/?p=5371

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Every so often, cyclically, collective or social anarchism becomes restrictive to some anarchists and an anarchist individualism reasserts itself. It happened at the turn of the twentieth century when some of the great anarchist thinkers began to question some of the more communistic dogmas. It is happening once more, and once more we witness some of the social anarchists writhe in panic as their comfortable dream is disturbed and they wittingly or unwittingly reinforce the stranglehold of the State by condemning their unruly sisters and brothers who appear to threaten the pursuit of what one comrade has aptly described as 'civil anarchism'.

It is a horrible creature, this civil anarchism. A slathering, craven and despotic monster with eyes in the back of its head which tries to be what anarchism will probably never be – palatable to the modern consumer masses.

One of the major qualities that those engaged in making attacks seek is to recover knowledge of themselves and each other, to recover personal power, to enact a radical and dramatic break from Society, with its intolerable cage of the social norm and the consequent deadening of individual sensibility. Some communiqués from this tendency are flowery and poetic in the extreme, and are not to everyone's taste, but reading an Anarchist Federation statement is deadening. It is the materialist deathmarch of politics against life, the patriarchal voice of 'political reason' against the wild rebel spirit, of the political against me.

The combatants seek to recover volition and dispel the inauthentic. This can only start from your experience, not from the experience or dogmas of others, although it involves your relationship with a few comrades within "the mass" or the "working classes". Until it is active, on the street, there is little genuine struggle to be found in some abstract crowd of people you have no relationship with. It seems incredible to read the thoughts of those that identify as (Formal) Federation anarchists and even more pointless to have to critique it. It is a bit like critiquing the performance of a clown by the standards applied to a serious drama. The issue for me here is the same denial of individuality that the State imposes – some herding of unique human beings into some utilitarian category by pedagogues and masters who find the individual unwieldy

and dangerous, but find an abstract ideological cage immensely comfortable.

This lack of authenticity and the somewhat anachronistic politics of their "revolutionary organisation" as a whole, is reflected in the Federation's outrage at the shooting of Italian nuclear boss, Roberto Adinolfi[1] and the letter bomb sent to the Chief of the Italian tax office Marco Cuccagna[2]. The Federation disingenuously manipulate the facts with regard to the latter in order to prostitute their particular ideology by describing the boss of the tax department as a 'worker'. Not only is this insulting to anyone's intelligence, who can see quite clearly that the target was one of the bosses who rob them every day of their hard-earned wages, but it is puzzling because they pretend to 'care' about the suffering of these targets and to state categorically that 'the working class' care too. If I am being authentic to myself, then I can say I do not care a bit if this bureaucratic robber is attacked, injured, killed. Actually, I am happy about it. I imagine many people would also not care and may even feel some satisfaction and even joy at the news.

Some basic questions of the Federation which do not really require answers: who are these "working class" people you speak of; how many individuals who make up the "working class" do you personally know; how do you know that all these people disagree with attacks on capitalist infrastructure, bosses and tax collectors; what gives you the right to speak for anyone but yourself; what do you say about the "working class" people who rioted in London in August 2011 (and throughout history)? To even ask these questions seems ludicrous, but a quick look at Federation discourse seems to necessitate them since they seem so sure of themselves.

The Federation/Libcom mindset continues with its psychometric assessment of supposed "terrorist tactics". They borrow another meaningless spook from the hostile media and the State – the mindless, indiscriminate anarcho-insurrectionalist-"terrorist". Again, how many of these individuals does the Federation know, and how does the Federation know that such acts are not part of a rich and more complex life. Furthermore,

[1] http://325.nostate.net/?p=5259
[2] http://325.nostate.net/?p=3668

project is doomed. At the end of the day, I say to the Anarchist Federation and their fellow travellers: I do not agree with you, I do not desire the world you envision. I say I am not alone in finding your statements and perspectives antithetical to my own rebellion and my personal concept of liberation which is based on my understanding and experience of State oppression. And since your project depends on the absolute agreement of the mass of which I am a part, and since it appears from the debates and statements of the Federation that what is envisioned is a mass anarchist society, I declare that I want freedom not only from the State but from Society and you. I ask then: what are you going to do about me?

I began this article by essentially wishing to encourage those of us who call ourselves anarchists to cease mutual condemnation and to assert that actually not one of us has the "answer". However, I end by sensing that some of "us" know so little of what it means to be liberated in heart, thought and action, and so little of what class solidarity and struggle really means, that I can only imagine an anarchist society such as appears to be the aim of the Anarchist Federation, would be as fraught with repressions and various prisons as this one. That is, unless those who would impose their faceless societies on the rest of us realise their futility.

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to state the obvious, insurrectionist methods are widespread amongst the disaffected of the world, as widespread as 'organising', and sometimes have more in common with "working class" rebellion than anything the Federation comes up with. The Federation is tellingly silent on this reality in the main, preferring only some parental nod to "working class" anger that could be so much more constructive if only the unruly would acknowledge the wisdom of Federation physicians and swallow their prescriptions.

Here the Federation again reveals itself to be incapable of liberating itself from the shackles of ideology: that denial again of the complex human being and its shunting into some useful abstract category. But as we look at the Federation's reactions to other anarchists, it actually becomes more sinister, in that they are frequently almost indistinguishable from our enemies. It's choice of forum is the internet. A brief review not only of critiques of technology, but also experience of it, reveals how destructive this form of faceless, mass interaction is. Furthermore, the language used by the Federations is akin to experiencing the fist of repression coming down on the human face of anarchism. The Federation reinforces the State, by adopting the rhetoric of the industrial-military-technological system, such as its aforementioned recent condemnation of anarchist "terrorist tactics".

In the quest for liberation, the individual must be allowed to express itself, to follow itself. The individual is not always at odds with the collective, but to try to squash individual drives into some collectivity or society against its will is totally useless. The individual will sooner or later rebel because a mass collectivity forged at the expense of the free individual will entail rules and regulations (albeit informal or even unspoken) which are against liberty of life, feeling and thought. These tendencies have been at war before, and it is worth reading the essays of Voltairine de Cleyre on this matter with her suggestion that the individual anarchist be free to express their rebellion in their own way. Violent attacks against the bosses and the State will alienate some people, but not all. Pacifist action will alienate some people but not all. Even if we could once and for all identify every "working class" person and also get them to agree that they are "working class", do the Federations really think that this mass of people will hold one homogenous view on social

change, on the causes of misery and on the best way to liberation (if all agree that liberation is their goal). The civil anarchists are searching for a purposefully driven conscious proletarian class which no longer really exists in the manner they describe as a revolutionary subject in the West. They have embarked on a hollow search which ends in sterility at the level of the actual uncontrollable mass social clash, and anyway largely failed to follow their own politics through to their conclusions.

The separation of people into classes is in some ways a nonsense when it is not based on their individual opinions or actions. A brief look at Native American history, as one example, shows us how banal and inaccurate it is to speak of 'the Native American people' in one homogenous outpouring of bad breath: there were indigenous warriors fighting genocide and assimilation and there were also indigenous folks who colluded with the American State and turned on their own people to accumulate money and power.

Those of us who might be allotted the label of insurrectionist, individualist, and/or nihilists do not make perfected claims to knowing how revolution will come about. There is a great humility in the words of the emerging rebels and armed struggle groups. I would say that at this point in history, when so much has been tried and so much has failed, let us admit that we do not know what is right, what will 'work'. People are far more complex than that and the world is huge.

The Federation's distillation of everything down to "working class struggle" is problematic. The working class as it used to be has all but gone and anyway, like democracy, it was originally rooted in horror and lies for many. Democracy was invented on the backs of a Greek slave class and the Industrial Revolution first imposed the destruction of the individual and introduced 'the dispossessed herd' as it ushered in this age we hate. Focusing on the "working class" in this way is like shuffling between different forms of oppression, saying that we prefer that form of oppression over this one: people fought tooth and nail against becoming subsumed into a "working class" at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The assimilation of artisans and rural peoples into the industrial working class was bloody, so why some anarchists are attempting to reify it now, especially now that the machine has moved on and is now subsuming the traditional working class into the post-

industrial consumer class, is not just questionable, it is bizarre. They are all simply stages in the grinding progress of the machine and we would do well to abandon all of these chimeras. This is not to deny that a class struggle has always and continues to be fought, but I prefer the term "social war" to "working class struggle" largely because it includes more individuals and their choices, including those who consider themselves traditionally working class. Class as a concept and as a social binder has become increasingly muddy over the years. People can be more crudely divided – if we must – into the rich and the poor, the included and the excluded, the critical and the uncritical regarding the State and civilisation.

To be denied individual autonomy, recognition and relationships causes alienation and disempowerment. The authority of a ghostly mass over the individual does nothing except assist the project of the State and capitalism by agreeing that the individual human being is nothing more than an economic unit or a vast and faceless aggregation of economic units. Is this really how we wish to define human beings and do anarchists really think that such a perspective is liberating? To negate the role of individual action in favour of a vague conception of the "class-struggle" of yesteryear is a dangerous fiction. Certainly, since it is also the project of the State to destroy the volition and value of the individual; it cannot be called revolutionary, except in the autocratic uber-political sense of being ruled by statist apparatus – none of which desire empowered individuals or like-minded groups of individuals who want freedom. It is not the role of anarchists to replace one tyranny, be it "democratic", monarchist, collectivist or any other kind of rule, with another.

What is this 'issuing of statements' condemning the acts and opinions of others who consider themselves anarchists? It is to play the political game of 'good anarchist' and 'bad anarchist' for the media and the repressive machine of the police. It is to undermine the very meaning of the term 'anarchy'; a complicated and shifting web of principles, praxis and relationship with the goal of liberation which is not a singular state of being, no more than it is a State.

Moreover, the fact that the Federation feels the need to make statements against acts of other anarchists must surely show them that their