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Rethinking Anti-Militarism Today

Anarchist Federation (French Speaking –
France, Belgium, Switzerland)

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coinciding with the one of nationalism, discipline, the domination of human by human, and that it is, in its core, an ally of all type of conservatism and fascism (without forgetting the industry that benefit broadly of military operations). We do not support any army, may it be the soviet one or the standing army. On the contrary it seems to us important to underline the militarisation of the minds, the self-control; harmful because army ideology is restrain any freedom of thought, it is only submission; dire because we think that nothing good can came out of this principles. In this, it is time to take into account the militarisation of society and minds, there is no sane army. War to all wars, but above all death to Armies.

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dination and the fright of differences are the rule. It is easily illustrated with example of homophobic or sexist humiliation. It is then difficult not to consider this as a sign of the drift of societies toward right-wing politics. Militarisation is visible everywhere – patrols, surveillance, placing everybody on files – using always more elaborated tools. As a matter of fact, capitalism understood this very well: more and more armies are private, composed of mercenaries, fighting for the highest bidder.

Although can we really say that the army follow a universalistic model? Let's take a look at armies sociology. Who volunteer as a simple soldier, sent to die in meaningless mission, who pay the price of governments decisions ? Is it the bosses, the politics, the heads of industries? No, most of the time it is young men and women, coming from the working class and/or the immigration. The military cannon fodder, because it is more about this than a formation or learning skills like they present it in the TV commercials, is composed of the poor, the helpless, that sees the army as a beneficial way to escape a broken educative system. The young people that got a degree, that had access to higher education, that are coming from wealthier families, are not soldiers but officers. Sadly, the class analysis is finding here it's very realisation: far from levelling class differences, the army is perpetuating and amplifying class domination at the service of the interest of the State. In reality what we see is the crushing of individuals by a big machine: it swallows them up fresh and spit them out after use. This institution is not interested in its soldiers once they are out: what support for the trauma, the wounds, the return to normal life?

Updating Criticisms

It is important to renew and state again the anarchist idea of anti-militarism. We have not to forget that the military spirit is

is not part of our immediate environment, militarism is feeding on the “necessity” for the State to defend itself against foreign threats, like ISIS for example, but also inside threats: terrorists, and more broadly any class of the population suspected of treason against their homeland. (zadistes,⁴ some radical environmentalists, the Muslims for some people, the Jews for others, and in the end everyone that does not go along with the nationalist narrative, for the most extreme). The army is a tool of domination physical as well as ideological, leading to the constitution of a common identity against deviant behaviours identified as harmful.

More than a murderous war – which can happen again though! – (there are less casualties every year among the French army than in the construction sector) it is militarisation of society here and now that is problematic. We have to update anti-militarism to not only target the imperialist function of war like in the 19th and 20th centuries, but also targeting the social function of the army via the militarisation of our societies and ideas.

What is army for? Besides border control and managing population movements, it also has a gathering role. To get people together using a shared narrative, a universalistic national identity supposedly inclusive and based on merit. The school system, tottering, cannot stop the social reproduction of inequalities, the army benefit of an image of an institution based on merit and equality, within which social mobility is possible. Even more, it is a privileged social institution in times where globalisation is eroding national solidarities: it is becoming the place of nationalist. Inward-looking. It is no surprise then if the fascists are idolising the army as the ideal realisation of their dreamed society: order, leadership, organisation, subor-

⁴ Name given to participants of a Zone A Défendre in France. Briefly it is a name for activist trying to block large project causing threat to the environment.

If the USA and Europe have been generally at peace on their own soil since World War 2, it is not the case of the rest of the world : Syria, Yemen and Democratic Republic of Congo to name just a few. Yet the signs of war did not disappear from our lives, and France is facing an important militarisation, allowed by the state of emergency,¹ that has been legitimised by the attacks including among the population. But, even more than within our countries, it is abroad that we export war: military equipments, military operations, in Libya, Mali, Irak, neocolonialism to steal resources etc. We must not be blinded by our situation here in Europe: if we live at peace it is not the case of humankind in general, and the continuous war that is ongoing through the world often involve our governments. Although war is not taking place on our homeland, the military spirit is developing.

Nowadays, militarisation is riding high, soldier are patrolling, news report are showering French soldiers in foreign operation with praise, advertising campaign are everywhere. In 2016, 86% of the French citizens still had a positive opinion of the army, making the 2nd most appreciated institution just behind the hospital. But do we know this for sure? Data are hard to find because of the forbidding of ethnographic or qualitative work, scandals are stifled internally so we have to go with the official point of view, the one that march through the Champs-Élysée every 14th of July.² It is difficult in this conditions to have access to information and develop an accurate criticism of this institution.

What is left of anti-militarism then? Almost nothing. And yet it is crucial to revive it.

¹ Laws of exceptions that applied for from 2015 to 2017 in France, giving extended power to the police and army.

² Each Bastille Day a parade marches through Paris every year on 14th of July.

What is Anti-Militarism?

The *Encyclopédie anarchiste*³ define militarism this way: “Militarism is a system that consist in the possession and maintenance of armies and military staff. It’s essential and stated goal is the preparation of war. The creation of a permanent army, the organisation of officers for the army reserve, the accumulation and maintenance of an ever evolving armament, in short the prerequisite organisation for war. This colossal organisation, available to governments, allow them to pursue a double goal : to be able to fight against foreign governments in case of conflict between them and secondly to detain a formidable apparatus of violent repression in case of a popular uprising. Governments have an absolute need of an army both against foreign and domestic enemies.’

Anti-militarism is the opposition to militarism. The army, warmongering, imperialist, hierarchical and nationalist is of course an aspect of militarism. Let’s have a look at this terms. The warmongering aspect correspond to to the fact the army, answering to a State, will systematically serve the interest of the power in place, for example leading colonials wars, foreign wars or by maintaining public order during protest. It is not surprising that the army is used in many countries as a political weapon, what have been sadly demonstrated during the Arab revolutions. The imperialist aspect is a strict consequence of this last point: army as a governing tool is the mean by which a State is imposing it’s own power to the population, and specifically to those who do not have the tools to make themselves heard. Recent wars lead by the USA, like the 2nd Iraq war, are typical of an imperialism that aims to defend Americans interest abroad. France is not doing any better in Libya or Mali. On the inward side, is the nationalist aspect of the army: an army

³ Encyclopedia of anarchism initiated by Sébastien Faure, published in 1934

defend the national territory and fight for the Nation, the borders, and why not the traditions or the spirit of a people. Just as many elements anarchist are opposed to. Finally, the hierarchical organisation of the army, with a commandment and the subordinates, is reproducing of the domination relationship between humans.

However, it cannot be said that anarchist are defending peace at all cost: armed struggle is necessary under certain circumstances, in case of self- defence for example. But the libertarian conception of armed conflict differ from actual militarism : it is non-bellicist, anti- imperialist, non-hierarchic and anti-imperialist. We have a few examples with the makhnovist Ukraine and the Spain of 1936. Anti-militarism is therefore opposed to the offensive use of the army as well as it’s spirit, to war as well as militarism. The anti-militarism is opposed both to the offensive use of the army and the spirit, both to war and to militarism. Yet we must distinguish the two : if war is absent, militarism is thriving.

Forms of the Modern Militarism

Once again, we want to make clear that being a military means being at the service of the State first. We have to get rid of the propaganda done by media and governments that present the army as a personal development activity, presented as a way to achieve personal fulfilment, brotherhood and the protection of civilians. Beside trivial missions, like the fact to defend the country against a foreign attack, which is not the case in western countries for years, the role of the army is irremediably the same, maintain order and manage populations. Once again, we want to make clear that advertising campaigns we see from bus stops to schools, army is not a benign life choice like any other. It is by military actions that States establish their imperialism and their power on territories. If war