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Street Anarchy

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2015

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2015

yourselves. It can be scary, but it's the dizziness before a revolution that starts. The only thing left is for you to join. And what if you don't succeed? Goddammit, at least you would have tried.

I've said it before but I won't stop saying it. If they exploit misery, it is our task to organise it.

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We are at a pivotal moment. Consumed by the electoralist fever, demobilized by the partisanship of the new generation, we forget that for those down below the shit is still covering them up to their necks. The sick and the hungry, the homeless and the immigrants can't endure any more of your vote counting or your insufferable theories. We can run away from our responsibility as long as we want, but there's nowhere to hide. I myself tried to address this matter by creating an idyllic community of rehoused people, believing that the revolutionary response would come later. Too concerned with guaranteeing the stability of the neighbours, and especially that of their children, it took me two years to understand that the path of the conflict must go hand in hand with the work of creation. It may make life more uncertain, but if the construction of the new doesn't happen in parallel to the destruction of the old (like classics like Bakunin and Proudhon recommended), you will create a beautiful walled city, but you will leave untouched anything beyond its borders; and in the end the exterior will breach the fortress and will do the same that humidity does to the stone.

In this moment anarchism, the entirety of the social movements, is at a crossroad. There's a gordian knot that seems unsolvable, and both the pure theoreticians and the institutionalists intend to cut it with a penknife; from the FAGC we assert that it's time to use a guillotine. Get involved in the neighbourhoods, don't be afraid of the hostility, the mistrust, the bickerings and the animal instincts that I assure you you'll come across. Strike now while the mirage of recuperation hasn't yet reached even those with empty stomachs. Look for the one who doesn't have a home or a salary or government help or hope. Call the whole neighbourhood and confront them with the idea that it's in their hands to change their situation. Grow little by little, with effective assemblies and free from pompous speeches. Offer reality, naked and coarse reality. And start taking, taking and taking until there's nothing you don't manage

Second, no one has the monopoly of the social struggle. If you think a campaign is lacking, that it is being used as a pawn for electoral purposes, and you think you can offer and structure things better, more effectively, more radically, there's no reason why you should cede the territory to anyone – none that makes us that there has to be exclusivity or imposture in the housing front. Third, we have to be aware, as anarchists, of the necessity of articulating our own answers, our own programs, our own strategies. Yes, the fights have to necessarily be popular and collective, open to everyone; tactical alliances are equally desirable, as long as they are limited to the work and don't require concessions. But we have to be able to structure a differentiated road map with our own objectives, we have to show to the people that we offer veritable solutions to the social issues, and know how to communicate that we have our own revolution going on.

The situation, thanks to the so-called “progressive candidatures,” can be more favourable than what it looks like. Develop this strategy everywhere, but don't miss the chance of honing in on wherever the “champions of housing and social policies” have reached power. Squat en masse, with the support of the neighbours, and start laying the foundations, the theoretical support, to show the contradictions of these “progressive parties.” Whether because their insensibility and incompetence is what forces you to squat, or because they trigger or condone a repressive reaction.

This general proposal, of intervening in a struggle based around a good (or means of production or service) to radicalise it, take it to its final stages, and make the popular body (the assembly of neighbours or renters) that initiates and fights on said battle be the one that ends up organising said good, is a simplified way of starting a revolution. The councils or soviets were just this in their origins. This is what the third movement is about.

Translator's note

Ruymán Rodríguez is a member of FAGC (Federación Anarquistas Gran Canaria or Gran Canaria's Anarchist Federation), which centres most of its activity on the issues of housing, rent and homelessness. They are known for housing homeless people in squatted buildings run along anarchists' principles without the members needing to share the same ideology. The biggest one so far, La Esperanza, houses more than 260 people, around 160 of them minors. More recently the FAGC has called for a rent strike to demand better conditions for renters during the COVID-19 crisis. The strike is supported today by more than 60.000 tenants. This a series of three articles written in 2015 where Ruymán explains how the FAGC sees the way forward for anarchism based on their experience these years.

Two Anarchisms

“Anarchism is not a romantic fable, but a hard awakening [...]”

(Edward Abbey, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* [Vox Clamantis en Deserto], 1990).

The dichotomies between “anarchisms” evolve periodically. During the late 19th century it was between collectivists and communists, organisation and anti-organisation, individualists and syndicalists, pure syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists, etc. Today this theoretical brawl, which seems to develop cyclically, has been established between insurrectionism and social anarchism.

In the 19th century some anarchists wanted to unravel the Gordian knot by speaking of “anarchism without adjectives,” and in the late 20th century of “synthesis.” These days it is necessary to go beyond that.

The disputes, if they don't fester and become stagnant, are positive. The theoretical debate is healthy; what is unhealthy is when the debate replaces militancy. Some anarchists confine their militancy only to anarchist spaces. Whether to protect its essence or bring it up to date, the dispute is still framed wrongly, as it was in the 19th century.

Yes, the dispute between collectivists and communists helped us realise that a subsection of anarchism at the time was still tied to a specific conception of private property and salary and that another wanted to transcend that and be generous; also how one tendency was trying to be realistic and practical and another could be too optimistic.

It was an underlying issue that revealed approaches and attitudes. But it was also a dispute about something that was yet to take place: a social revolution that put the economy in the hands of the workers. The debate may have helped to outline what would happen in revolutionary situations like in 1936, but the debate for its own sake, without transcending the theoretical realm, can imagine the best of futures, but remains mere speculation; a mental experiment about nothing, when you still need to create everything. It may have also been that the debate between the different syndicalist perspectives had a more practical dimension, but it was still based on the same erroneous premise: to transform the praxis of others. We are only in a position to change our own activity; if you don't like something, work in the opposite direction and let experience prove if you were wrong or not.

Consequently, the debate should not focus any more – at least not primarily – on the ideological realm; the validity of an idea must be measured by putting it into practice, in the realm of facts. Enough of supposed divergences based on agreements, congresses, thinkers and models based on the imaginary.

From my point of view there are only two anarchisms: the contemplative and the combative. Regardless of if they are given the name of insurrectionary anarchism or social anar-

chism, they are useful tools to the neighbours and establish contact with them. How many empty houses owned by the banks are in the neighbourhood? So occupy all of them and make the neighbours directly manage the public good of housing. We have to take the step, cross the threshold, and turn squatting into collective expropriation.

How many of your neighbours pay rents to the same real estate agency, bank or rich landlord? How many can't pay or are about to find themselves in that situation? Once again, call a neighbours assembly and give that fatalism a conscious dimension. They soon are going to lose the home because of not being able to pay the rent, so give not paying a political character: propose calling a rent strike. No one pays, either until everyone's rent goes down (if the disposition of the people doesn't allow for anything more radical) or until the management of the houses is put in your hands with no intermediary.

Do you organise in a libertarian union? Propose to integrate the labour struggle with the social struggle (which doesn't mean just having good intentions, writing statements and supporting campaigns, but to start your own way of intervention and confrontation, directly revolutionary). To compete with the establishment unions using their weapons is either a waste of time or suicide. The nature of libertarian unionism always was multifaceted, and extended beyond the purely laboural plane. In order to survive, anarcho-syndicalism needs to adopt integral solutions and offer tools not limited to factories or even consumer cooperatives, but that directly address the issues of the poorest neighbourhoods. We must bring back the renters unions that anarcho-syndicalism pushed for back in the 30s, and take neighbours demands to a different plane.

And what about the platforms that already work around housing? First, we have to distinguish between those that undertake a committed and altruistic labour, with a revolutionary base, and those that are ineffective, are in the pocket of the political parties, or are motivated by nefarious interests.

In our last occupations we have been applying that principle and the results have been very positive. We certainly participate in less rehousing, but the experiences are better and the participants more in need, more committed and more active. We have also learned that behind the criticisms of “assistentialism” we often find voices with little experience that, unwilling to abandon their ivory tower and walk among the filthy and difficult reality, show their disdain for active militancy by looking for pretexts instead of offering alternatives. The risks of assistentialism are not overcome from a comfortable distance while surrounded by those already convinced.

Once organised, with an established protocol to avoid becoming an NGO or a real estate agency, we are missing that last twist that I mentioned in “Street Anarchy II,” that third movement: the way of conflict.

The third movement is the one that makes the difference between conventional squatting (an act that closes its cycle on its own, revolutionarily innocuous) and programmed expropriation of households owned by banks, with the objective of establishing a communal management of a collective good (an act that means a direct political, social, and economical challenge).

It’s not enough to occupy houses, which usually only affects a limited number of people. It’s not even enough to make them available for the people and use them for rehousing. In the end we can end up reinforcing the System by compensating for one of its shortfalls and inhibiting people in protest by helping them get back on the capitalist train. We need to occupy and rehouse, but as part of a political strategy of mass socialization that aims for the neighbours themselves to manage consumer goods through assemblies, just like we expect the workers to do with the means of production.

The strategy is simple: unite with those other combative anarchists, call a popular assembly about the most urgent topic that worries your neighbourhood (I use housing as an example because it’s the field we have more experience with), offer

chism, any of them can represent one of the two tendencies depending on the situation.

The contemplative anarchism lives through other people’s lives, its terrain is one of inward debate. It sets up to analyse and discuss, to anathematize engaged in endless internal fights. Its field is that of theory and stillness, be it of the committee, assembly or demonstration, of the social network or the burning of rubbish bins (a theoretician of the Molotov is not less contemplative than a theoretician on an office). Immobility as a way of life; pontification as the mode of operation. Talks and the spreading of ideas is its natural environment, the place where it feels comfortable; incapable of transcending this habitat to get a taste of the pavement or the land. Anarchism itself is its battlefield, its object of dissection, the subject of its militancy. The contemplative anarchism is the childish and immature phase of the anarchist ideology, no matter how serious, respectable and experimented it may look.

Combative anarchism, that which we defend and practice in the FAGC, is the anarchism that rolls up its sleeves, goes into the streets and fights.

Whether it is raising the pressure on a demo to get people to respond when the police charges or forcing the circumstances so that a labour conflict doesn’t come to a halt. It’s the anarchism that gets its hands dirty. The one that fights in the factory, in the neighbourhood assembly, in the street. Gamonal and Can Vies are examples of this, the “La Esperanza” community too. It’s the anarchism that has surpassed the limits of talks and the militancy of the word. It doesn’t believe that putting something into words is enough to change it. Its activity is outwards, it’s not directed towards satisfying the “initiated,” to preach to the converted, its circle of comrades is too small. The discourse created for internal consumption is a cacophony for this anarchism. It doesn’t militate for the anarchists; it militates to bring anarchy to the soil, to bring anarchy to the people. It designs its tactics and strategies, its roadmap, by defining well

what it wants and what is considered a victory, so it is able to advance to the next stage. Its habitat is the neighbourhood, the shanty town, the park, the ditch, abandoned land, the expropriated houses. It's the anarchism understood as an adult ideology, no matter how daring and audacious its aptitude, or how new its approaches may appear.

In my experience in these last four years at FAGC, and specially the last two in the "La Esperanza" community, I've come to conceive of anarchism as an adult ideology. Idealism is necessary, but not based on fantasies and chimeras, but on the real capacity to apply our ideas to transform the environment. We must find the limits of our myths – ideological, theoretical or any other kind – to discover the fallibility of respected thinkers. We must try to apply the ideas keeping in mind that no matter how many historical precedents they have, and how much you are able to draw from past experiences (history must be seen as a clue not as instructions), the reality is that this current experience has never been tried before, only by you and your comrades. The self-referential talk vanishes and only the hard reality remains. It's hard, but it's yours.

This reality is so because it stands on something tangible. In the 19th and 20th century there was an anarchism of the factory, and that was its strength. In this period there also was a cultural anarchism that gave a theoretical and literary underpinning to the street effort. We propose a street anarchism, an anarchism of the neighbourhood, and for the socially excluded. The worker of the 20th century wakes up in the 21st century and discovers that, after surviving the capitalist crisis, they've gone from qualified labourer to homeless. They are people destined to marginalization because they've suffered a change with almost no transition: workers yesterday, indigent today. For some it hasn't changed, they've been born conditioned to live in the street. They like the anarchist message because of its utility. The hostility towards the police and the rejection of the sanctity of private property is natural to them;

have no capacity to decide about our present, so we try to decide about something that has no relevance and belongs to a future that is slipping out of our hands. Let's work so that one day we could argue about these problems in workers or community assemblies, but until then let's not waste time.

Once we come all together, willing to work together but not to think the same, to combine efforts but necessarily sensibilities, we can select the objective. The FAGC chose housing, and everyone interested knows the results. Yes, we are responsible for the biggest occupation in the whole Spanish state, but I already said in my previous article that that is not all, we still need a third movement. What was done alleviated the situation of many people, it has allowed to extend the life of some of the most urgent cases; and that is already the most important thing. But it's not enough to stay there. It would be like organising an army and refusing to declare war. Everything lived, good and bad, must serve to extract conclusions, reflect and take the fight to a new stage.

And what about the long and surrealist shadow of assistentialism? We have learnt our lesson and found the way to avoid it. The social struggle, by offering real solutions to real problems, allows us to get in contact with the people. But for the relationship to advance it is essential that the person affected stops being a receiver/observer and starts being an actor. And that's achieved by establishing as necessary that the person being rehoused takes part in their own rehousing. Do you want to receive help? Here we are for you, but first prove that you are capable of helping yourself and others. Do you refuse? Very well, we won't give more solidarity than the one we are offered, that's all. Whoever really needs a house will have no option but to question what they've learnt, what the system taught them, their own way of behaving with others, before they can make a decision. It's possible that it won't produce any change, but we would have made them confront a hard contradiction face to face. A what was said about rehousing also applies to the rest.

nity and, lost in their liturgy of banners and hymns, don't want to see that even the most reformist collectives have overtaken them on the left, thanks mainly to their activity. Another significant part abandons ship and, seduced by the siren's song of the establishment, flirts with electoralism, the new parties, and starts believing something incomprehensible: that voting is the transformative novelty; and that to abstain and create on the sidelines is the orthodoxy.

We raise our voice from the dirt, in the very heart of poverty. I won't speak to you with a clean face, neither will I shake off the dust in your presence nor offer you a washed up hand; down here, where we get down to work, it doesn't smell good, there's no sterile debates and rhetoric doesn't accomplish anything. While working in misery, we are trying to organise it. Let's begin!

We are not interested in the war for acronyms, the scuffles about banners, the internal feuds of families, sects, tendencies and clans. It's like seeing two starved insects fighting over the remains. Anything that tries to drag us into that is not welcomed. We also don't want to hear intellectuals babbling or fighting among themselves, telling us about a past that cannot be repeated or inviting us to advance while they themselves don't move their asses from their seats. There's a new anarchist that is active, pragmatic, that wants to be adult but not to grow old, and that is not willing to get itself tangled in the ideological disputes of its elders. Our proposal is to make a call for all combative anarchists to work together. This verb is key: to work. To coordinate efforts based around practical work proposals, leaving asides brainy questions about the future of a society we still are not strong enough to preconfigure. We spend hours arguing about what type of fuels will be used in the post-revolutionary society, how will the means of production be managed, what resources will it use and which not; and we still haven't made the revolution that'll allow us to have these problems in front of us. Because of our incompetence, we

they need certain types of mutual aid to survive at points in their life. If this discourse becomes an efficient model to fully satisfy basic necessities in practise then anarchy works; it's useful for them and, without turning them into anarchists, it's enough.

We don't need to be labelled insurrectionists for our radicalism or social anarchists for our work. We are combative anarchism and those kinds of labels are too narrow for us. We've been given a reality check and we have discovered that anarchy works in practice, that you can organise a micro-society of 250 people effectively following this model. But we also know that helping somebody doesn't change their mind, and this I will expose in a future article.

What matters now is to know that neighbourhood anarchism, immersed in social marginalization, working in the ghetto, is vital. An anarchism implicated in the real problems of the people. It's vital not because on its own it can "convert people," but because it's the best, if not the only, way to reach them. To reach the people you have to address their interests and needs.

But if vacuous provocation is not enough, which at least kicks the hornets' nest, even less so is the talk of reforming institutions. In a moment when people are more detached from politics than ever, our mission is to force a rupture, not to seek conciliation with new ways inside the same structures. The situation is ripe for relaunching popular organisations from below, to mobilise people (and us with them) on the base of their primary necessities and demands, to give structure to the underground, to give body and muscle to those (of us) who have nothing. To entangle them in electoral promises, in local political aspirations, in the creation of institutions, is suicide: first, because they have never felt so distant from them; and second, because finally they are capable of doing other things. When a wounded enemy has to restructure themselves in a hurry, you don't reinforce them, you finish them off. The institutions have

to be seen as the enemy from whom you have to take things by force, through pressure and attrition; the adversary you undermine until you lose all fear and respect for them. Not like the weapon that is good or bad depending on who wields it. Beyond opportunistic hypothesis, something is crystal clear to me: the mice about to be devoured also think they are toying with the cat. That is playing politics: to believe you are giving respite to whom is about to consume you.

I don't play games where others dictate the rules. And there is an anarchism that doesn't either. That anarchism knows where its natural place is to enter the social life, it distances itself from infighting and joins in on the aspirations of the people to see if they can be criticised and taken further. This anarchism doesn't establish itself on parameters of moral superiority (sorry if my rhetoric makes it seem like I want to go around giving lessons), I don't do it because mine is the "last word" in social revolution; I propose it as a simple matter of survival. Either we limit ourselves to the endogamy of the "anarchy for the anarchists" (when anarchism should be for everyday people) or we let ourselves be killed by entering power structures that will eat and throw us away before we even realise. Until now these seemed like the only alternatives: closing yourself to the outside or surrendering your weapons and ammunition. It can not and should not be like this, our survival and that of our message depends on the battle, on the streets, on the most instinctive necessities of the people. We need to detect what they need, see if our praxis can provide it, adapt our tools to the moment, come up with a program that gives theoretical support to our conquests and, once the path forward becomes clear, share those tools and collectivise them (knowing when to step aside).

I don't care about caricatures; it's not the first time I've been called "slum anarchist" or "anarcho-lumpen." I only care about results. Street anarchism has been the best method of introduction to our practices in years. The biggest housing occupa-

The Third Movement

"On, on, onwards, for the fire is hot! [...]"

"On, onwards, as long as you live."

(Letter by Thomas Müntzer to his followers, 1525)

In the previous two articles I talked about the two types of anarchism I had identified, and of the potential and limits of the social struggle; now I'm going to talk about the necessity for combative anarchism, committed to the social struggle, to transcend its starting point and reach a superior revolutionary objective thanks to well-designed and solid strategy.

Analyzing the situation of activism, social movements, including the anarchist, have been on the defensive for years. We only come out to the streets and mobilize to not lose ground. We don't know how to attack. The only thing we want is not to lose past conquests, but not to make new ones. Fights like militant unions, housing, education or healthcare are framed today in those terms. They are respectable movements of self-defense, not structures of attack. Honestly, I believe it is time to go on the offensive.

We need to overcome this ongoing situation where we are just trying to take punches as they come, and learn how to fight back, to trade blow by blow, to hurt. This last decade of struggle, and especially the experience in housing, has taught me that when one focuses their militancy in the management of a "small matter," in the preservation of what you have, you risk losing the ambition to go further. And this can turn what was supposed to be just a phase, the means to an end, into an end in itself.

I know it's not the best for me to talk about not limiting yourself. We live in a state of retreat, as anarchists and as social activists. A few, resigned but pragmatic, try to save the furniture from the shipwreck, and try to build something for the future. A majority is still impervious to the lost opportu-

the FAGC obviously no. Achieving this victory will be an example of what can be accomplished through squatting, by making the banks and the political powers submit to a policy based on proven facts. It must and can be reproduced in other places. But if we don't give this strategy a final twist, its practical result, if it were to be successful and go viral, would be to increase the number of council homes in the State and grow the public housing sector. And that's not our objective. Our objective is to give a roof to the families, but under a completely different social paradigm.

When you intervene in workers union organising and try to achieve an improvement of working hours or salaries, what we achieve if we win is a partial victory and a show of strength. What matters is getting that practical experience, building the muscle. But if we limit ourselves to reduce the hours or increase the salaries, we will only be reinforcing the capitalist model of work. If we decide we have other aspirations, we'll have to prove it with something more than declaring your intentions. It's the same thing with housing. The idea is for no one to die in the street, that's the priority; but understanding that what causes that to happen is the current model, and therefore we shouldn't just treat the symptoms but also cure the disease. By giving a roof and stopping the rehoused person from being evicted from their home, we show strength and respond to an atrocity by tackling it directly; but if behind that there is not a third movement, that demonstration will go no further. It'll remain as an end in itself.

The struggle is not something automatic (struggling for its own sake). You struggle to destroy barriers and reach objectives. When do you know if the struggle is important? When you've reached that objective and yet you have the feeling you are just getting started.

Make way then for the third movement!

tion of the Spanish state hasn't been accomplished by a party, an electoral coalition or an organisation of the system. It was started by an anarchist organisation using anarchist tools and making an anarchist model work without needing everyone involved to be one as well. That neighbourhood anarchism has given 71 homes to 71 families which account for more than 250 people. We don't need theory to show it, the facts speak for themselves, the obstinate reality speaks for itself.

Social Struggle

*"To-morrow for the young the poets exploding like
bombs,
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect commu-
nion;
To-morrow the bicycle races
Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-
day the struggle."*

(W.H. Auden, Spain, 1937).

Let's start by pointing out that the person speaking to you about social struggle fancies himself an individualist. I am an individualist because I am wary of my independence and personal criteria, but also for pragmatic reasons. When you implicate yourself in the social struggle is necessary to retain a large dose of individualism: to not become corrupted, to avoid letting yourself be dragged by gregarious impulses and majoritarian urges, to know why you do the things you do.

But I am sickened by aristocratism; I am an individualist because I want, for every single person, a unique and strong personality, and let everyone develop their own "self" without environmental limits or impediments. But how to tame the environment so that it is individuals who shape it and not it that shapes the individuals? By implicating ourselves in the social struggle, there's no other way.

Our contempt for the current society can lead us to resignation. Be it through a satisfied nihilism (“there’s nothing to be done and it’s better to vegetate and occasionally make an appearance on social media or a well written article”) or the castaway attitude (“even if we don’t like it this is our habitat, let’s adapt to it and save whichever furniture washes on the shore”). To ask for everything to burn without raising a finger or entangle yourself in electoral reforms or popular electoral reforms are examples of both attitudes. Resignation, more or less an active one, but resignation nevertheless.

To resign oneself is to surrender, and that is as if one is dead inside. We need to implicate ourselves in the social struggle because only then we’ll be able to change something, even if it’s only a part of the portion of the world we’ve been given by chance. But we have to implicate ourselves with a big dose of realism; so much realism it sometimes hurts.

We need to know that you can implicate yourself, succeed, change people’s lives and still not change anything on their minds. A petty person who is hungry is not different than one that is fed, except in their material capacity to hurt. They might have more or less possibilities, different priorities, but they are fundamentally the same. To idealize the “working class” (category that if it’s not limited to set the line between the oppressed and oppressors is of no use) is absurd. The male worker is not the character from the soviet posters nor is the female worker the one from the american WWII propaganda. The excluded and marginalized, the “class-less,” among whom I include myself by birth and calling, don’t fit the fixed romanticized vision of nomads and free spirits. We are beings of flesh and bone that cannot be observed from the outside, only lived from within.

To assign virtues and defects when they are not inherent is a source of injustices and frustrated expectations. Those of us who work for revolution need to have something clear: it won’t be done by nietzschean supermen; it will be done by people with prejudices, full of taboos, burdened by sexist, racist and

with real and quantifiable results. That is what validates your proposal; everything else is rhetoric, verbiage and paper, and that has the same weight as banging your fist on the table at a pub.

But we have to be realistic: if the division in the lived experience between the anarchists and the rehoused must be erased (as this is the only way of not only avoiding vanguardism but also of promoting self-emancipation and engaging those affected to the fight for their own cause), we have to be able to detect differences and similarities between our aspirations; there lies the limits of the social struggle. Personally, as an anarchist, and in relation to the “La Esperanza” Community, I could prefer an occupation sine die, a constant challenge against the state and the financial institutions, surviving in a constant emergency situation. But precisely as an anarchist I don’t like declaring a war on behalf of someone else. I cannot throw people, with kids of their own, to fight against windmills spurred on by my ideas. I must know and understand what are their real aspirations and how far they are willing to go. And if they’ve already gone as far as they can, I can’t force them to engage in ways of struggle that haven’t yet develop within them. The necessity creates the means, and those ways will develop naturally when it is the right moment. I need to understand that if for me illegality is an option and a resource to defend, for them it is an obligation born out of necessity. After the war people want peace and we can’t criticise them for that. With that in mind I redact legal documents that disgust me because the community I’m part of needs them and trusts me to give them substance. “La Esperanza” has decided to regularize their situation, going in with everything: if it goes wrong, it’ll continue existing outside of the law and won’t abandon the apartments; if it goes well it will have successfully challenged the system and forced it to give in to their demands.

Will achieving those demands be the end of everything? As a community, maybe yes, but as part of the global strategy of

in a combative way and rehousing people without a home in individual houses expropriated from the banks, we started the contact with the people and demonstrated that things could be done in a different way, one that is more committed and efficient.

While embroiled in the popular aspirations for housing we started the phase of the “La Esperanza” Community, because we needed to make a show of force with a project big and showy enough that it couldn’t be hidden from public opinion no matter how hard anyone tried. Rejecting the victimism of thinking that no matter what we do we’ll be silenced, we’ve tried to show that regardless of the manipulations and misrepresentations of the media, if you do something of enough magnitude it is impossible to shut it down and sweep it under the rug (to this we must obviously add a great capacity to work and know how to design a good “media war”). After that comes a third phase that I’ll explain in the last article of this series.

What was done in this second phase has its importance and meaning, not only for its obvious social dimension of giving a roof to such a huge number of adults and minors, but also in other aspects. In our movement it seems like some think tanks squabble over a ridiculous hegemony. They invalidate what the competitor says with words, always with words. If a proposal looks to them to be too radical or too reformist they don’t try to oppose it by comparing it with a practical example that proves it wrong, they oppose it with another idea. When they criticised the legal reform proposed by the PAH (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages) to regulate housing in Madrid for being too useless and legalistic, that criticism may have been correct (in fact it was), but if you don’t present an alternative the people will have no option but to go with the only alternative that is in front of them. We criticised the legal reform and as evidence to back our criticism we created, for example, the “La Esperanza.” What we need is an action tank, action groups that take actions to validate our theories, an activist backing

xenophobic ideas. This is the human material of revolutions because people don’t change from one day to another no matter how much you try to change the circumstances. The initial enthusiasm mitigates these attitudes, but without a previous pedagogy we can’t expect people to throw away their emotional baggage instantaneously.

Are we sure that by changing material conditions we won’t be capable of changing subjective conditions? Not necessarily. Kropotkin is one of my favourite thinkers, and after studying him and trying to apply some of his proposals —those that seemed to me more urgently realistic— I can confirm that at least in some of the presuppositions of *The Conquest of Bread*¹ (1892) he was wrong. Or rather, to be fair with Kropotkin, the error is not on the main thesis of this work (fundamental, otherwise), according to which the first question to solve during a revolution is that of bread; we are the ones who are wrong if we believe that just by being the first question must be the only one. The first question of the revolutionary phenomenon certainly has to be to satiate the basic necessities, but we would be naive to think that this fact alone will abolish all forms of hierarchy. If Tolstoy reminded us you cannot speak about non-edible things to someone with an empty stomach,² we also can’t expect that by filling up that stomach we will obtain a behavioural change in that person. We can give shelter, roof and bread like Kropotkin recommends, but if the capitalist mental structure hasn’t been shaken, the improvement of the material conditions won’t have substantially changed the nature or the aspirations of the those affected. We can create a society of satisfied needs and economic equality, but that alone, without doing background work, won’t eradicate power and submission. Kropotkin used to say that if people had the means

¹ Digital edition on the Anarchist Library: theanarchistlibrary.org

² “Before we give the people priests, soldiers, judges, doctors and teachers, we should ascertain if they happen to be dying of hunger” (*The Triumph of the Farmer or Industry and Parasitism*, 1888)

of production they wouldn't have to kneel in front of someone like Rothschild; they may not grovel for bread, but they can still be made to submit by brute force, fear or deception. Economical equality doesn't eradicate authoritarianism or hierarchical vices, nor does it swiftly erase capitalist tics.

This can be seen in the example of the communes and resistance communities. A micro-society that organises with an anarchist model, one in which this model proves itself efficient and effective, can be a showcasing of how anarchy works "too well," because it's capable of improving the conditions of the lives of those affected, of satiating their needs, but with very little effort required of them. You can't create an oasis of anarchy surrounded by a desert of capitalism, because sooner or later the sand seeps through the door.³

Most of the libertarian communities of the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, and even more so the hippie communities of the second half of the last century, failed for a clear reason: they constituted themselves in closed communities, isolated, without realising that people don't leave their "old mentality" at the entrance. This was already explained by Reclus in his text *The Anarchist Colonies*⁴ (1902). A society doesn't have a life of its own independent from its members, although there is some kind of collective group psychology that makes it behave like a living organism. As such, it dies if it stays closed off and can't breathe, and lives when it lets air come in, can breathe and nourishes itself from the outside.

³ Although truth be told, unless there is a difficult global revolution, any form of anarchy will always initially occur surrounded by capitalism, be it at a small town, a big city or a whole region. It changes the resources, the competencies and the scale, but its imperfection is a manifestation of anarchy. That's why I can maybe say to have lived in anarchy, and that is beautiful and hard

⁴ Digital edition on libcom: libcom.org

*"Let us make everyone who dies of hunger and cold understand that every product that stokes the warehouses belongs to them, because they are the ones who produce everything, and let's encourage and help them to take it all. Whenever there's a spontaneous rebellion, as has sometimes happened, let's hurry to mingle in in it and to try to turn it into a coherent movement by exposing ourselves to the danger and fighting together with the people. Later, through practice, ideas emerge and opportunities present themselves. Let us organise, for example, a movement to not pay the rent; let's persuade the field workers to take crops back to their houses and, if we can, let's help them carry it and to fight against the owners and guards who don't want to allow it. Let us organise movements to force the municipalities to do everything big and small that the people desire, like for example to lift the taxes for essential goods. Let us remain always among the popular masses and let's make them accustomed to take by themselves those liberties that could never be gained by legal means. To summarize: everyone should do whatever they can according to the place where they are and the environment around them, taking as a starting point the practical desires of the people, and always inspiring new desires"*⁶

What the FAGC tried to do with the "Group of Immediate Response against Evictions" and the "Renters and Evicted Union" was to intervene in a real aspiration of the population (housing) while staying away from the moderate and legalist proposals from the local platforms and collectives, to bring the fight for a place to live to new presuppositions, deeper and more radical. This is the first phase of our fight. By stopping evictions

⁶ In Times of Elections, 1890

Despite that, something should be made clear: the anarchist model we propose doesn't need to convert people into anarchists to work; that would be abhorrent. Anarchism for the anarchists is chauvinism. Anarchism becomes useful when is directed towards those that aren't and will never be anarchists. That is when a project or model proves it works.

Our objective is to reach those who have nothing, not to turn them into conscious anarchists, but because only them, those who suffer and struggle the most, have objective motivations to want to change their life and reasons to obsessively tear down everything. The anarchist message of freedom and autonomy is for all of humanity; the one about three meals per day and a roof over your head can only be for those who lack that. The anarchy for the satiated, for the intellectually bored, is an useless artefact. The libertarian principles can be taken by everyone, they can change the inner life of anyone who consumes them no matter their ascendancy. But its economic and social program is directed towards changing the life of those who today have to eat mud. That's why it is important to intervene in that fight; there's no other way to change what is around us.

How to do it? From the inside, without paternalism or impositions. The "parachute" tactic that jumps into a conflict, coming from the outside, will lead to failure. You only have the right to intervene when you have been seen to get your hands dirty, sweat and bleed; and not even that will dispel all suspicions. We need to create a project in which the difference between the anarchists who initiated it and the people with generally no ideology who join it gets blurred over time, without ranks, vanguardism or primacies.

By taking interest in the real worries of the people, the ones that come from them, and not the ones you want to introduce them to from the outside. Once we have taken part in their interests, their fight, their demands, our mission as anarchists is to take them a bit further, a step beyond. Malatesta understood this clearly:

This centrifugal and centripetal qualities I spoke of on the previous article are not only applicable to different kinds of anarchism, but also of communities and militancies. In my experience on communities I've been able to experience how the periods of forced isolation and endogamy encourage depression and immobility, but when you interact with the environment you are part of and receive stimuli from the outside the organism that is the community renovates and revitalizes itself. Same thing with militancy. The activity centred on your own group, which doesn't open and expand itself nor wants to interact with the outside, is useless and engenders calcification. It's essential to move towards the outside, to irradiate. The blood that doesn't flow coagulates and causes gangrene; movement is the basis of life, the basis of change.

But I will be asked: why should we get involved in the social struggle if material change doesn't have the intended immediate results? And even if it were desirable, what strategy to follow?

The great aspiration for revolutionary anarchism, and for most social movements, is to reach the people. It may be true that through the social struggle, by helping them and promoting ideas of self-management, their mentality won't change. But that's the only way of establishing contact with them. I understand the good intentions, but to a family searching for food in the trash, who is trying to separate the rotten from the decomposed, you cannot tell them about the virtues of veganism or the pernicious effects of transgenics; it sounds like an insult or a macabre joke. These things, which are really a display of your consciousness, are relevant when you have your basic needs satisfied and a stable status; the malnourished are only interested in not starving to death. When you speak of things detached from the immediate reality of people and try to drag them into our politics, instead of evaluating what can our worldview offer to them, we are establishing a line of separation between the people without ideology and the anarchist.

Which mentally, is not that different between the one there is between the dispossessed and the proprietor: different interests if not directly opposed.

We have to analyse what legitimate interests people have that may intersect with our ideas and praxis and try to get involved. Back in 2011 the FAGC realized the alarming need of housing that there was in the Gran Canaria Island: between 25 and 30 evictions every day while there are 143,000 empty homes in the archipelago. The people needed a roof; so that's what we had to offer to them, because our ideas are perfect for it and because historically, from the Paris Commune to the squatters movement, it has been part of our tradition.

I've already said that the politics of bread, even if they are a priority, are not enough on their own. We need to use big doses of pedagogy (steering away from indoctrination and proselytism), socialize formative tools, strengthen people's independence and create committed circles willing to defend their gains. Yes, bread is not everything, but it's the only way for that formless and ineffable mental construct that we call "the people" to take you into consideration and be able to tell you apart from all the other snake-oil salesmen. Yes, the propaganda by the deed has limits, and showing the correct path and taking it is not enough to get others to do it themselves; but it's the most honest and coherent way of spreading an idea and trying to get people to adopt it. The experiential way, of doing what you preach, is the only one that gives you the right to put a proposal in front of people. If you haven't lived it before, don't sell it to me. To give basic necessities the priority it deserves, and not to offer poetry, liturgy or scholastics to someone who is in need of protein is the only way to start being serious, the only way to not appear detached from reality.

Certainly the capitalist reflexes and the bourgeoisie tendencies can persist in the mind of the person who just stopped being destitute thanks to your help. Liberated from hardship

maybe their consumerist mentality will be strengthened. But if they managed to change their living situation through libertarian means, with direct action tactics away from legality, the reality is that the example remains and survives; and that serves as evidence that even if the human material fails, the ideas and practices don't. And anyway, if the seed of your example of mutual aid and autonomous organisation only germinates in one in every ten people, that's enough for the social struggle you started to have been worth it.

Wilde speaks in his "The Soul of Man Under Socialism"⁵ (1890) about how boring the "virtuous poor" were. To demand for the poor to be virtuous, on top of being poor, is not a matter of being "boring," but of brutal and unjust insensibility. In the social struggle you'll discover people who haven't had any contact with anyone for years, who have been excluded from basic comforts, who have been in a permanent state of war for decades, who feel that everything that surrounds them is hostile. We should not be surprised if they have difficulties trusting and even take advantage of the people lending them a hand; it would be more surprising if they didn't jump to your jugular immediately. But instead, many people who have been treated like wild animals since they were kids, constantly harassed by their environment, become inspired by a solidarity given in exchange for nothing, except compromise, and by a way of acting that rejects any kind of leadership and servilism. They learn to help others, they open houses for homeless families just like they were opened for them. They realise the next step is to protect themselves autonomously; the illegality they were forced to use before now serves a deeper objective. Maybe they'll become interested in the ideas that took them this far and they'll start talking about anarchism. And if not, they no longer ignore the meaning of the word or fear it. Inside them a change of paradigm takes place.

⁵ digital edition on project gutemberg: www.gutenberg.org