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Socialist Programs

William Gillis

13th November 2009

Now, obviously, as an anarchist I oppose affirmative action, welfare, public education and the like because they're statist programs and, as such, are inherently, unavoidably, grounded in violence and the perpetuation of power structures. As statist programs they ultimately do more bad than good. And of course given freedom we could accomplish their stated ends far more efficiently without oppressing anyone.

But.

There's nary an anarchist in the world that would go out of their way to abolish such projects *first*.

The reason for this is strategy. The first task of a prisoner is to escape, and with that goal in mind we're not about to stop eating the meals they give us. Sure those meals are poisoning us. Sure those meals are sapping our strength and conditioning us to salivate on command by the prison guards. But. We. Must. Stay. Alive.

In examining socialist programs it's critical that we not sully our analysis with instinctive allegiances but instead look only upon how effective those programs are at sustaining us. If the warden takes away our meals many of us will die in our cells. This makes the prison's "food program" a momentary necessity.

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<http://humaniterations.net/2009/11/13/socialist-programs/>

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If people are locked out of jobs by the corporate monopolies that our government set up and their homes are bulldozed by investment firms with politicians in their pockets, those people are not going to find new lives as roving vigilantes taking out bureaucrats and burning down office blocks. No, they're going to end up in even greater poverty, abject misery and alienation. Spreading the burden throughout their social nets.

Socialist programs, we all know, toe a balance between crippling the working class enough to keep them unable to revolt and satiating them enough with illusions of security to make them unwilling to.

The trick—as any half-cocked fool with a big beard could tell you—lies in exploiting the inherent friction between these two statist tactics. In generating the sort of dynamic social instabilities that make their analysis subject to calculation limits. Where they can't accurately judge which to give us where. When the carrot and the stick are frantically applied in such a way to inflame dissent and then supply us sufficient resources to rebel.

This is the core of our strategy with regard to their “public services.”

We embrace that which will keep us in the fight and reject everything else. At the same time we struggle to continue leading insurrection, building gardenboxes in the windows of our cells and preparing to retake that which they have not allowed us to organize for ourselves.

So when I look at a socialist program like affirmative action's mandatory quotas or biases my first step is to recognize that, since ends and means are interconnected, such a statist program will never solve racism or even make inroads. The application of statist oppression will only further inflame and ingrain the social psychoses at hand, although they may make strides towards some superficial semblance of material equality. The statist and hierarchical character of affirmative action is undeniable.

That said, the second step is to investigate whether despite its long term ill effects such a program is strategically necessary to our current survival. And while getting into fancy colleges and jobs at a higher rate is clearly not a matter of material survival, one can argue that some of the ways it provides exit opportunities from inner city “schools” to other forms of public education will allow—in some measure—an underclass to retain access to intellectual weaponry, which *does* directly pertain to the survival of resistance. Similarly, although hate-crimes laws are a ridiculous step towards the outright criminalization of thought itself, it’s worth remembering that anything that stops lynchings should be tallied as keeping us alive.

The strategic and tactical distinctions we’re forced to make on such issues are necessarily going to be complex and nuanced, but at the same time, as anarchists, we never lose sight of the fact that these programs are evil and that ultimately we oppose them.

Classic welfare programs, of course, are the most clearcut example. Since my family and I owe our lives many times over to Food Stamps and HUD, I’m not going to pretend I’m not biased. Obviously any welfare system is deeply predicated on state violence in the form of taxation and puts a superficial bandaid on the immediacy of capitalism’s crimes. But if you think welfare leaves the poor a bunch of lazy queens dependent on the system and defensive of it, you’ve never been forced to sit and wait while your life hung on the whims of government bureaucracy. Socialist programs that keep the poor alive are always a good thing, strategically. They sustain the class most likely to lead any insurrection and at the same time inspire in that class a fierce hatred of the government as well as a lasting critique of its inefficiency compared to self-organization.

All are reasons to momentarily avoid *directly* attacking such programs, but in no means are they reasons to avoid conflict with them.

As with any statist means, socialist projects will ultimately only further statist ends. But if by accident they give us any breathing room we, as prisoners, are obliged to seize it. To fight tooth and nail to build our own capacity for charity, mutual aid and self-sufficiency when they're not looking. The only solution to socialist programs is to make them irrelevant.