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2001

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Editor's Note: Alfredo Errandonea (1935–2001) was involved in the Uruguayan student movement in the 1950s and belonged to the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation, the FAU. He later became a university lecturer and researcher in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, depending on the political situation at the time, having to find temporary havens from various dictatorships. His publications include *Sociologia de la Dominacion* (Buenos Aires: TUPAC-ediciones, 1988). The following excerpts, translated by Paul Sharkey, are from his posthumously published essay, "Anarchism for the 21st Century."

If it is at all possible, it strikes me that the present time is an opportunity for us to debate how to readdress anarchism… we must return to the sources and try to look for an expression of our aims in our underlying theoretical foundations and, on that basis, work out the approach that these times require. Which, once achieved, cannot offer anything other than a gen-

eral guideline which allows us to pick out the specific course to follow in any given situation…

I think that if we are to do this we simply have to start from broader theoretical considerations…

Domination—which is power made flesh and institutionalized—manifests itself in the forcing of one's will upon another person (or on other persons) and excessive decision-making powers that reach beyond the person who exercises them. The power to make decisions regarding one's own person—the very same power which is restricted by domination by another (or others)—"power over oneself" —is partnership. As we can see, domination is at once the extension of "partnership" beyond the self and is a counterweight to that because the precise extent of the one crowds out the other. To put this another way: the greater the partnership, the lesser the subjection to domination…

If the purpose and justification of social organization is service to all, the wherewithal for achieving this and the essential demands made by everyone tend to grow in scale and complexity. The more developed a society, the more of its aspects and activities will fall under… the wider purview of "the public" and the more all-embracing the pertinent logic. So it is generally assumed that, in broad terms, the firmly guaranteed public sphere has been expanding throughout history from a nebulousness where everything was indistinguishable from the patrimony of the powerful, of the ruling class. The secularizing exercise of shifting the public from the private preserve of him that administers it, in whatever capacity, was, *de facto*, a whole emancipating historical process: the construction of "modernity." And this differentiation between the "public domain" and the preserve of the ruler represents one of the guarantees of a forward-looking effective collective existence with real and equal access to its surroundings for every member of society, an access that cannot be refused to some on the whim of the rest.

Meaning that the more effective the occupancy of the social space, and if it is guaranteed by its public status, the more egalitarian the society… because the province susceptible to privilege is precisely the private space… And the more aspects, activities and objects there are that are placed beyond reach of the private capacity to render them inaccessible, the more social objects (be they material or otherwise) there are actually within reach of everybody; not only is society more egalitarian… but the more authentically free are its members insofar as they have in effect an increased range of accesses from which to select. And of course, for that very reason, the inclusion within the public space of the actual contents of the thing constitutes one of the main cruxes of the current ideological debate between left and right.

From this angle, the idea of resolving public space affairs by hiving off as many segments of them as possible to the private sector (which is what "privatize" means) is quite simply one of the steps whereby the liberation of human destiny is abdicated. Quite apart from any subjective characterization of this, we are dealing here, in objective terms, with a genuinely backward-looking policy hell bent on returning to the days of "unbridled capitalism"…

The state as a political organization designed to look after the upkeep and administration of the system of domination has always been condemned by anarchists. It gobbled up the municipal and university autonomies that predated it by a long way. And it hijacked the public education and health institutions designed to cater to the general population, as well as other public services in many countries. It took over the monopolies over natural resources and other largescale productive ventures and employed a considerable fraction of the active population.

The fact is that, as this expansion proceeded, the state came to be used for the most effective maintenance of domination in terms of its political enforcement, the most explicit justification

of its bureaucratic existence, political parasitism, "clientelism" and corruption. But equally, there came an expansion in the "public space" element, in the legitimacy of the existence of collective social services and assets meant for all, even if their operation was inefficient and running at a loss.

This is the "public space" of which neo-liberalism's new rampaging capitalism wishes to be rid; responsibility for which it aims to jettison; and it seeks to do this by turning it all into "private property," handing over the management of it to firms that can then market them as commodities. Not caring about the vast social marginalization from "the public sector" of those who are denied access to it…

[T]he modern state is in crisis… in all likelihood, mainly as a result of the growing intrinsic contradiction between the administrative functionality of the class rule required of its governmental epicentre and [its role as] standing guarantor for the growing public sector in terms of social services and entitlements for the general population. But with this significant ingredient: a perverse logic that specifically sustains the political class, leading increasingly to lost efficiency and elephantine bureaucratic growth, since there is no correlation with the much needed function of service demanded by its immense public sector. Meanwhile, of course, the regime's economic system resents having to fund this.

In what is presented as "reform of the state," the aim is precisely to dismantle a public sector that has been inflated by the expansion of the corresponding public space in order to effect a brazen reversion to the "judge and gendarme" functions of unbridled capitalism. Whereas from the private sector there emerges the provision that corrupts politicians in order to take over sections of the public sector by means of buy-outs of state ventures sold off at bargain basement prices, supposedly to relieve the public purse of "loss-makers."

Besides the spuriousness of the "political class" using the state to take over "the public" for its own benefit, we anarchists

archist lobby. In which case the question that needs asking is whether there is any need for organizations of that sort to exist.

If the aim is to invest anarchism with some dynamic thrust, if we want to grapple with the issue of its being brought up to date, if we feel the need to update and deepen the analysis of where it stands vis-à-vis the present times and in different locations, if we feel it is important to coordinate the activity of its militants within a variety of popular organizations, if we feel the need to engage in reflection and collective collaboration… if the understanding is that all of this activity requires organizing and financing, then we must of necessity answer in the affirmative…

[L]est we take the wrong turn of ghettoization, and in order to sample life in a social reality wherein we aim to re-establish our presence, and because, ultimately, this is the arena in which we have to engage in our activity, it is also important that we begin to increase our much weakened foothold in the broadly-based popular movement. Even though this requires that we start from scratch.

To put it simply: we must shoulder the responsibility for that presence wherever and however we fit into society. And let us make a start by boosting, through such participation, our ability to reproduce our membership and to recruit and socialize those who have any predisposition to share in our ideological sensibilities.

amounting to a quasi-amalgamation (as in the case of the Spanish CNT-FAI). This fact had a considerable impact upon the existence of divided social movements (almost always trade unions) existing alongside other popular organizations in which different ideologies prevailed. This had a negative impact to the extent that the balance of power between the ideological strands within the popular movement began to operate in our disfavour…

Something that ought to emerge very clearly from any self-critical analysis is that the popular organizations (especially trade unions), wherein anarchism set its face against pluralism, finished up petering out as such. Not just because of the paucity of anarchist militants and those strongly in sympathy with them, but also because the social circumstances of popular activism are very inimical to the classical requirements of ideological definition and because a pluralist, all-embracing approach is a must for any popular organization, even those within which some political party ostensibly enjoys hegemony. This fact in itself represents a powerful reason militating against it and stigmatizing it as sectarian; and ultimately it explains why anarchism has been stymied in terms of a popular organization. Besides, this is a good thing if what we want is to set up popular organizations capable of taking over the running of society in the most libertarian society possible. Because it is unthinkable that such all-embracing organizations should be under the sway of social segmentation in any form, and that includes us as an ideological current. That all-embracing popular organizations should be ideologically classifiable is something that we can discard once and for all when deciding upon our approach to organizing any popular movement that anarchists wish to influence.

Of course, by definition, this does not apply to the specific organizations which, like the political parties, organize themselves with an eye to better administering the identifiably an-

cannot passively countenance a return to a comprehensive denial of people's rights to goods and services that have been acknowledged as "social," even if that acknowledgment was secured via the state. Let us think of them all as "public sector," as the space to which society collectively should lay claim. Obviously the way to do this is not "privatization," which purely and simply signifies its being returned to capitalist ownership.

The most anarchist way to achieve this is through the granting of autonomy and decentralization: handing the management of them back to the interested parties, to those who operate these resources and those who avail them: to their "producers" and their "consumers."

In fact, it does not matter whether the label hung on them alludes to their being "state" ventures or some other abstraction; what counts is that the actual running of them be in the hands of the people. It does not matter if they are turned into cooperatives, community bodies or public ventures, just as long as the management of them is handled by the interested parties completely independently of the political class, the bourgeois class, the bureaucratic class or any other.

To which end, in every instance, this should assume the most accessible form for achieving that purpose and be achieved through direct exercise of input by those for whom they are intended. So we anarchists should be pressing for partnership as a means of breaking down domination, by whatever means and pressures there may be and as much as we can. The fight is a fight for effective partnership.

Against the general backdrop of reduced social and political partnership which these days is felt throughout the life of society, and which affects all of the tendencies and organizations operating from the left in equal measure, there is also a loss of clout in the global social conflict on the part of those organizations and social movements that offer opportunities for partnership, be they traditional or new, including of course the classical trade union movement, once the arena best suited to

anarchist activity. This is a trend resolutely to be resisted: it is as if we were harking back to the days when our constructive efforts first began. And it is a struggle that should entail elaboration, organization or reorganization; as well as our being embedded in the social and political life of society, in the handling of activities, decision-making and social and public interests… wresting the initiative away from the private sector where popular collective activity can feasibly be introduced into any facet of social life. In actual fact, there is no alternative as far as any form of militant action goes.

In that… struggle… we are not going to be on our own. Nor would it be good for us to be so. Given our current marginality, our lonely presence would represent certain marginalization that would exacerbate our isolation, save for the likelihood of exceptional opportunities in very short-lived situations during which we might seize the initiative. In any event, our stance and outlook should be to favour the greatest possible opening-up, free of discrimination and with an eye to integration; and we should radically lobby for this when others deny it. Which is to say that our activity within the people's organization ought above all else to highlight its pluralism.

Our presence and action should be geared towards collective, constructive acknowledgment of responsibilities and decision-making and towards those organizations making their presence felt in social life and fellowship. And our conception of this participation should be directed at an intelligent marriage of decentralization and partnership that can do away with "delegation of powers", with its loss of primacy generally, and with the formation of elites or leadership cadres. Teasing partnership and commitment out of others, out of the generality, is an essential goal that takes complete priority in one of the contexts posited as a unit of the social organization of the future, and naturally for the pursuit of these forms of direct democracy in the overall organization of the life of society. This sort

of approach and the fight against the derailing of it ought to be the ideological keynotes of what we do.

…[T]he notion of the Social Revolution as an abrupt, apocalyptic act of insurrection is merely a romantic image drawn from 19th century history. The 21st century revolution is going to be a complex process, one that will assume multiple forms, accomplished over disparate time scales. There may or may not be instances of insurrectionary violence: that will depend on the resistance that the system puts up in different circumstances to the transfer of decision-making capacities and responsibilities. But in any event they are going to have to be the culminations of highly consensual processes that sweep aside apparent obstacles in the path of their natural development…

Given the trends in the world today, it is inevitable that opportunities for such revolutionary activity will present themselves in the widest variety of locations and in the most widely varying circumstances, especially where and when popular movement-based participatory processes manage to secure a foothold and engage a wider public, as well as building up the maturity that naturally leads to them. In which case our presence and an uttermost root-and-branch defence of the pluralism and direct democratic partnership implicit in the principles set out earlier are going to prove crucial.

Historically, there were periods when anarchism as a movement had a telling presence within the popular movement in many societies. Broadly speaking, there was then such a pre-eminence that the popular movement that it represented blended into the specific movement to make up a well-defined ideological organization: or it coexisted alongside a specific organization for those who defined themselves ideologically as such, as well as exercising a leading and generally telling presence within more broadly-based popular organizations. In which cases, the specific organization and the more broadly-based popular movement tended to have strong mutual ties to each other; up to and including organizational ties