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No Justice, No Peace, No Excuse

Boston Anarchist Drinking Brigade

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Since late April, much has been written in the left and anarchist press about the acquittal of the cops who beat Rodney King and the beatings, killings, and stealing that followed shortly afterwards in Los Angeles. As could be expected most of the leftist press either endorsed or apologized for the violence committed by the residents of LA, while justly condemning that of the LA Police Department. What is more distressing, but no less surprising, is the fact that some of the anarchist press, as well, has either supported or been unwilling to criticize the beatings and killings that took place in LA on April 29 and the following days.

During the “uprising” or “rebellion,” as leftists and many anarchists are fond of calling the events in LA, people of many different colors were beaten and/or killed, for no reason other than hatred; hatred sometimes based on racist feelings, sometimes simply based on viciousness and lack of respect for the lives and property of others. Few of those attacked were cops and none of them were politicians, judges, or even jurors in the trial of the cops who beat King; they were primarily people

going about their own business who were unlucky enough to cross the path of their attackers. The businesses, homes, and meeting places of many people, again, people of various colors, were trashed, burned and stolen from, including the Aquarian bookstore, the oldest black bookstore in the united states, and the Church of the Living God, an overwhelmingly black congregation. These were not generally the businesses, homes, or institutions of the wealthy, but the small shops of neighborhood businesspeople and the homes of poor people. Is this what the revolution means to the left in the united states? Is this the kind of society anarchists wish to build?

From June Jordan in *The Progressive*, to the editor of *The Libertarian Mutualist*, to Barbara Smith and Phill Wilson in *Gay Community News*, to the anonymous anarchists who produced *LA Today*, to the writers in *The Revolutionary Worker*, leftists and anarchists have defended, and “understood,” and explained, and excused this hatred and violence. They blame Reagan and Bush and racism and the courts and the cops and the firefighters for the destruction and murder in LA. Not one of them has said beating and killing other people who have not initiated or planned to initiate violence against another person is wrong, regardless of what happened in the courts earlier that day. The writers in *LA Today* were blunt enough to label the violence in LA as not only justified, but necessary, while the editor of *The Libertarian Mutualist* was moved to “commend the brave perpetrators of random violence for being right on target.” Neither have any of these writers said burning down other people’s homes and shops is wrong. Ayofemi Folayan, in *Sojourner*, even implicitly blamed the fire department for the fires in LA, despite the fact that firefighters were being attacked when they tried to do their job, instead of holding those who lit them responsible. They all apologize for (in the words of Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous) “the excesses committed by a population enraged beyond measure,” as if rage is an excuse for murder.

When a man, frustrated by his job and life in general, beats his girlfriend, do these people call on us to understand his rage? When cops, enraged by the refusal of one of their victims to obey their orders beat the shit out of him, are we expected to understand their rage? No, of course not. In such circumstances, we are expected to hold these violent individuals responsible for their actions and condemn them accordingly. The events in LA were no different. The haters there were no more defensible than the cops who bashed Rodney King.

The reason these writers were willing to defend the perpetrators of the violence in LA is because they apply a double standard to people, a racist and class-biased double standard. They seem to postulate that, because of institutional racism and economic inequality, black and/or poor people are incapable of making the same moral choices that non-black and/or non-poor people make, and are therefore not responsible for the violent acts that some of them engage in. On the other hand, many of these leftists consider white people universally responsible for the actions of *some* people who are white, and therefore, in their moral system, all white people are fair targets for the “rage” of the “oppressed.” As someone wrote in *LA Today*, “We have to realize that the conditions people of color suffer under in this country fully justify any act of resistance they choose to take, even if it ‘takes out’ a few of our kind (‘our kind’ meaning whites, anti-racists and racists alike). Some of the victims may be good persons, activists, good friends or lovers, but we must be careful to lay the blame where it belongs: not on Black [sic] people but on the racist white capitalist system itself. In the blinding anger of insurrection people don’t stop to ask your class credentials or your opinions on racism: if you’re white you’re a target. This is to be expected. Not fun, but expected.” Note that they say that racist murder is “not fun.” They never say it is “not good.”

Poor and/or black people, despite having fewer options in a number of areas in their lives, due both to racism and restric-

tive laws, still are capable of making choices about their actions, and are responsible for the consequences of their decisions, just as other people are. To think otherwise is to infantilize black people and/or poor people, to consider them less fully human than other people. Such thinking lays the basis for parentalistic interventions in their lives by the state, ensuring their continued dependence and poverty.

Despite the fact that leftists blame the state and white people for the violence and destruction in LA, they turn to the state (run primarily by white people) to remedy the situation, not by leaving people alone, but by becoming more involved in people's lives. They support government housing, government jobs, welfare, government-funded and regulated child care, government funded drug "treatment," more black cops, and other government-centered programs and activities. If racist government is the problem, how can it be depended upon to change things to the benefit of poor black people?

Getting government out of the way is the only thing that will lead to the changes that can produce an improvement in the lives of people in LA. One important first step would be abolition of laws which restrict the entry of poor and/or black people into various jobs. Taxi regulations which constrict the transportation market, licensing of hairdressers, nurses and other occupations which excludes people who can't afford government-certified training programs or licensing fees, and zoning laws which prevent people from working out of their homes or setting up shops in some areas are all forms of government intervention in our economic life which keep many black people in poverty. Another area where state intervention is harming poor people is housing. Government-protected titles to abandoned property prevent people from homesteading and developing empty buildings, forcing them to rely on dirty, dangerous government housing. Additionally, drug laws, which criminalize a voluntary, private activity, promote the violence and theft that devastate

many neighborhoods where black people live. Encouraging people to rely on themselves instead of the state can lead to self-sufficient, independent, and, hopefully, more rebellious people; people who will rebel against the real evils in society, the government and its laws, courts, cops, and military, not their neighbors and other non-coercive people.

The events in LA pushed leftists and anarchists to show where they stand, and, unfortunately, too many of them are standing on the wrong side. Leftists have been embracing government, racism, nationalism, murder, and destruction as the means to a free society at least since 1917. Historically, however, anarchists have talked of the need for consistency of means and ends, i.e., only moral or ethical means can yield moral or ethical results. But the anarchists who produced *LA Today* and *The Libertarian Mutualist* and those who share their views, expect us to believe that murder, assault and theft today will somehow lead to freedom and anarchy in the future. The experience of the authoritarian socialist movement has put the lie to such ideas, but apparently many anarchists are slow to learn. Unless anarchists develop a critique of the welfare state, abandon their leftist racism, and encourage people to rely on themselves and assume responsibility for their lives, there will be little to distinguish them from the rest of the authoritarian left, their anti-statist posturing notwithstanding. Only by encouraging libertarian actions in the present can we have any hope of a libertarian future.