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The Libertarian Revolution

Diego Abad de Santillan

2005 (1936)

Upon his return to Spain in 1933, Abad de Santillan took an active role in the CNT and the FAI. He advocated a kind of anarchist pluralism in economics and politics, in favour of a mixed economy and wary of some aspects of the decentralist, libertarian communist position adopted by the CNT at the Zaragoza Congress. The following excerpts are taken from his book, *After the Revolution: Economic Reconstruction in Spain Today* (New York: Greenberg, 1937; originally published as *El Organismo Economico de la Revolution*, Barcelona, 1936; republished by Jura Media, Sydney, 1996).

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Scanned from Robert Graham, ed., *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume 1: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300CE-1939)*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005). Selection 125

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We are cognizant of the fact that the grade of economic development and material conditions of life influence powerfully human psychology. Faced with starvation, the individual becomes an egoist; with abundance he may become generous, friendly and socially disposed. All periods of privation and penury produce brutality, moral regression and a fierce struggle of all against all, for daily bread. Consequently, it is plain that economics influences seriously the spiritual life of

the individual and his social relations. That is precisely why we are aiming to establish the best possible economic conditions, which will act as a guarantee of equal and solid relationships among men. We will not stop being anarchists, on an empty stomach, but we do not exactly like to have empty stomachs...

The ideal of well-being is shared by all social movements. What distinguishes us is our condition as anarchists, which we place even before well-being. At least as individuals, we prefer freedom with hunger to satiation alongside of slavery and subjection...

If anarchism for the anarchists can exist with abundance as well as with misery, communism must have as its basis, abundance. In communism there is a certain generosity, and this generosity in a time of want is replaced little by little by egoism, distrust, competition; in a word, the struggle for bread...

Communism will be the natural result of abundance, without which it will remain only an ideal. In each locality the degree of communism, collectivism or mutualism will depend on the conditions prevailing. Why dictate rules? We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy. Therefore there must be free experimentation, free show of initiative and suggestions, as well as the freedom of organization.

To make possible this freedom, we must insist on the prerequisite of abundance which we can attain by the thorough use of industrial technique, modern agriculture and scientific development...

We are not interested in how the workers, employees and technicians of a factory will organize themselves. That is their affair. But what is fundamental is that from the first moment of Revolution there exist a proper cohesion of all the productive and distributive forces. This means that the producers of every locality must come to an understanding with all other localities of the province and country, which must have an international direct entente between the producers of the world. This cohe-

sion is imperious and indispensable for the very function of all the factors of production...

We believe there is a little confusion in some libertarian circles between social conviviality, group affinities and the economic function. Visions of happy Arcadias or free communes were imagined by the poets of the past; for the future, conditions appear quite different. In the factory we do not seek the affinity of friendship but the affinity of work. It is not an affinity of character, except on the basis of professional capacity and quality of work, which is the basis of conviviality in the factory. The "free commune" is the logical product of the concept of group affinity, but there are no such free communes in economy, because that would presuppose independence, and there are no independent communes.

One thing is the free commune from the political or social standpoint and quite another, from an economic point of view. In the latter, our ideal is the federated commune, integrated in the economic total network of the country or countries in revolution...Our work on the land and in the factory does not make of us individual or collective proprietors of the land or of the factory; but it makes of us contributors to the general welfare. Everything belongs to everybody and the product of all labour must be distributed as equitably as the human efforts themselves. We cannot realize our economic revolution in a local sense; for economy on a localist basis can only cause collective privation and scarcity of goods. Economy is today a vast organism and all isolation must prove detrimental...

The revolution may awake in many men the forces of liberation, held in lethargy by daily routine and by a hostile environment. But it cannot by art or magic convert the anarchist minority into an absolute social majority. And even if tomorrow we were to become a majority, there would still remain a dissident minority which would suspect and oppose our innovations, fearing our experimental audacity.

However, if today we do not renounce violence in order to fight enslaving forces, in the new economic and social order of things we can follow only the line of persuasion and practical experience. We can oppose with force those who try to subjugate us in behalf of their interests or concepts, but we cannot resort to force against those who do not share our points of view, and who do not desire to live as we attempt to. Here, our respect for liberty must encompass the liberty of our adversaries to live their own life, always on the condition that they are not aggressive and do not deny the freedom of others.

If, in the social revolution, in spite of all the obstacles, we were to become a majority, the practical work of economic reconstruction would be enormously facilitated, because we could immediately count on the good will and support of the great masses. But even so, we would have to respect the experiments of different minorities, and reach an understanding with them in the exchange of products and services. Surely, as an historical minority, we anarchists have the right of revindicating this same liberty of experimentation and to defend it with all our might against any individual party or class which would attempt to crush it. Any totalitarian solution is of fascist tailoring, even though it may be defended in the name of the proletariat and the revolution. The new mode of life is a social hypothesis, which only practical experience should evaluate...

We want, first of all, to recognize the right of free experimentation for all social tendencies in our revolution; for this reason, it will not be a new tyranny, but the entrance into a reign of freedom and well being, in which all forces can show themselves, all initiative be tried out and all progress be put in practice. Violence is justified in the destruction of the old world of violence, but it is counter-revolutionary and anti-social when it is employed as a reconstructive method.