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Is kidnapping a method of revolutionary struggle?

A libertarian socialist position

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There are ideas and actions on the world that claim to transform it, that transformation being the theme of all political work, in which ideas of what “has to be” become social imperatives when it comes to the public good. This leads to the extreme polemics of ideological positions that arise from both “reactionary” and “revolutionary” sectors confronted with the march of historic events. Not only do they polarize themselves, but each position includes contradictions and insulting misunderstandings. In the unstable parts of the world where social conflicts continue to storm, the discussion of goals and methods continues to be common in contemporary politics.

This difficult debate is going on in Colombia, a country full of social contradictions and contrasts. Insurgents there use a method of “political” struggle that raises major questions, such as: is it possible to legitimize kidnapping with economic or political intentions?

On the one hand, economic kidnapping has been adopted as a tactic of “class war or struggle.” Those with this view claim to distin-

guish themselves from those who carry out the common criminal kind of kidnapping that seeks to satisfy a group's desire to enrich itself by exchanging those it kidnaps for valuable loot. Those adopting kidnapping as a tactic of "class war or struggle" claim they are using it to finance a superior, altruistic and avenging goal like social revolution.

On the other hand, political kidnapping tries to make dramatic impacts by holding figures with significant power captive in order to use them in hopes of creating pressure to grant social demands, repeal repressive laws, remove military checkpoints or facilitate "humanitarian exchanges" (obtaining the release of other social and political fighters, such as unionists imprisoned for so-called crimes of rebellion).

At first glance, even though these methods are illegal as far as the establishment is concerned, those who use them believe that the rest of society sees them as legitimate. With this version of armed struggle, they claim to be social justice and shock force leaders defending those most oppressed by the abuses of power. This argument also seeks to warn and punish the powerful of all kinds who cynically conceal and deny the existence of inequality and injustice. It is a defiant and daring way of responding forcefully against the typical legality and morality of the privileged. However, its logic usually overlooks the relationship between the ends and means of social struggle, not reflecting on whether the intended ends justify such means nor pondering other aspects of justice, the deprivation of liberty, the humiliation and/or tortuous ordeals to which prisoners are subjected, the suffering and worry of their loved ones and the counter-productive and repugnant effect this struggle tactic generates in the opinion of an emotional and vulnerable public.

Paradoxically, this "revolutionary vanguard" would be correct to question itself about the forced disappearances and political assassinations it carries out, cruel and abominable methods violating human rights and carried out with fire and blood in fascistic actions

intended to dissuade, demoralize and remove forces opposing them on the social stage.

To what extent can political struggle separated from ethics end up blurring the vision of a better society?

Unfortunately, in Latin America and in Colombia in particular, where armed struggle still survives as a means of creating a supposedly new society, for some time the fight for that society has been taking the dangerous and authoritarian path of Stalinism. The struggle, in which elite vanguardist and messianic minorities are involved through military action, has made them believe they are the bearers of Truth who have the absolute right to control everyone's lives—from dissidents to kidnap victims—and the country's destiny.

The most shameful thing is that, on this continent, it is contributing to another round in the political self-destruction of socialism because its suicidal practices are almost no different from dictatorial, paramilitary and fascist cruelty. It has created a many-headed narco-landowning monster in the image and likeness of its opponents. Obviously, it's clear that this authoritarian shortcut not only debases the struggle for social justice, but its adherents also run the unfortunate risk of appearing like the enemy.

Depriving both rich and poor (like private soldiers and police) human beings of their liberty, using them in a Machiavellian way as pawns or human shields of war and keeping them in isolated makeshift archipelago "gulags" in the thickest and most dangerous part of the jungle for long periods in hell is clearly and simply fascism. All of us who love freedom and social justice cannot fall into this trap and believe naively that there is a "good and justified" fascism of the Left and another, "evil and unjustified" fascism of the Right. To be precise, fascism is an armed and anti-democratic oligarchy that uses its monopoly on weapons to impose its will, no matter what. The people, that is, an organized society of free and critical individuals, must completely oppose such nefarious methods if they don't want to be accomplices or victims of such tragic

intentions sooner or later. Furthermore, it is urgent that we begin defending ourselves from those who say they're defending us.

What even more horror and tragedy there will be in a "dirty and covert" war like Colombia's if we become accustomed to losing sight of our ethical values on the cloudy horizon of justice, if we don't reflect on the wisdom, harm or unsuitability of political actions taken against the ethical integrity of others.

What meaning or value would there be in holding on to the inhuman principles of a historic war when the practices of the supposed armed wing of the people only deepen national and international repudiation and strengthen in turn the laws or governments of the Right that, with the pretext of "fighting terrorism," criminalizes all peaceful social protest?

If we are seeking to transform society into a more human and just one, we cannot use the same logic of authoritarian power as the most reactionary of the Right has traditionally used. Furthermore, how much more harm will this mistaken practice produce to the cause of a free and democratic socialism distinct from the Stalinism taking course right now in Latin America through its current followers?