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Chavism and anarchism in Venezuela

El Libertario editorial collective

April 7, 2008

From the publishers of El Libertario goes our reply to the habitual expressions that the coarse right or the easy-going left used to attribute us; the same left that, inside and outside of Venezuela allows that the mirage of the Chávez pseudo-revolution impressed them. We could and would like to say very much more about this subject, however currently here there is the essential and concise information about our point of view that, even when it was expressed several times it does not implies that it does not have to be repeated.

Hugo Chávez talks about socialism, popular sovereignty and participation. So, why posing disappointments if those ideals agree with anarchism?

The rouses of Chávez are so diverse. However, he himself has expressed that we have to pay attention on what he does, even on what he says. In this sense, his ‘Twenty One Century Socialism’ would not become more than mere populism and State capitalism on the base of affluence and the oil incomes. Popular sovereignty is the sovereignty of an elite shaped with the military, transnational companies and the incipient “Bolivarian bourgeoisie”. It is enough to aware the recent concessions

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of extraordinary powers to the presidency, or the way their allies are bewildered when they were expressed disagreements related to their decision to constitute an only pro-government party to have an idea of what the commander understands as participation. In anarchism, it is not allowed any kind of permanent and all-powerful leaderships, but only those that would be constantly ratified by those which were in a particular circumstance they represent and that is the expression of sovereignty and participation, something that is not present in this process and in no other one that is supported in the hierarchical and permanent power of the State.

The evident intention of this government is to make a pacific and democratic revolution. So, why do not wait that the process flows by itself rather than giving opinions about it?

Chávez speaks out about a 'revolution' but his words are not enough to believe this is a fact and to support him. Too many tyrants and demagogues of this continent had told the same without any reason to support them. In our case, there has been a revolution in the sense that our way of life has been dismantled in many ways, but its constructive side would not cause our support. To allow its consolidation is to make all things more difficult to change, because the changes that the male and female anarchists want go in a very different direction in relation to the taken by this 'process', that with more than eight years commanding it shows as plenty on authoritarianism, bureaucratic inefficiency, structurally infested with corruption, with paths, figures and attitudes that we cannot support.

If it is truth that their project is different from the libertarian one, the chavism calls to confront the oligarchy and imperialism. What would happen if alliances with them were made and then, defeated by the oligarchic conspirators and imperialist aggression, they united us to try to make an anarchist revolution?

The strategic alliances are ways of political action for conquering the power of the State by the allied group, while the male and female anarchists search for the dismantling of the State with the participation of everybody; male and female. The defeat of the so-called reaction and oligarchy; mere nicks with propagandistic purposes will only serve to consolidate in power to the winners, which necessarily conforms a new oligarchy because that is the logic of State control as occurred at the USSR, China or Cuba. That would make more difficult the anarchist revolution and Spain in 1936 was an example of that. It is too inexact to identify the chavista project as an opposition to conspiracy, when their first goal was a coup (d'état) and they constantly brag their identification with the barracks language and practices. The fight of the minority (oligarchy), against the government within the state regimes reduces itself to the fight between a minority against another minority. In the context of the fight against imperialism, if we focus on the policies that are offered and put into practice by the government in fields like oil, mining, agriculture, industry, at the labor field, etc.; all of them seem they want to be supporters of Empire, not their enemies (For more details about their connections with transnational capitals and imperialistic interests see: www.nodo50.org/ellibertario).

Now, it is announced by the Venezuelan government an explosion of the communal power, with the massive implantation and hanging over for the Communal Councils, communitarian and horizontal organizations of popular power. Do anarchists support those kind of grassroots structures?

We began to see that the establishment and functioning of the Communal Councils will own its existence and capacity of action as depending on their loyalty to the State, which is assured allowing the President the juridical faculty of giving or not the approval to those organizations, in the way it is expressed in the corresponding laws. In Venezuela there are

examples of that kind of situation, where a lot of grassroots organizations (as the trade unions for not going further), they always has seemed the tramcars which receives current from above. Indeed, there are attempts for a real organization from below toward above, and it happens in some fields as local, peasants, natives, ecologists, students, cultural, etc, even when they do not have the affection of the government. We think that the legal, functional and financial submission of the Communal Councils to the power of the State will be a severe obstacle to begin from it a grassroots autonomous movement. This is also valid for the announced Workers Councils for the companies which seem to be a project to waste away a free trade unionism.

Why do anarchists criticize the Venezuelan Armed Force, of a unambiguous popular and nationalist root, and its capability of supporting the revolutionary project?

In all modern armies, since Europe in the XVII and XVIII centuries to Latin America at the present day, the biggest part of the troops are conscript of the popular sectors. However, despite the origin of the majority of their members, the reason of the existence of the army is the defense of a structure of power and of its supporters, and this is the reason why the army cannot support a revolution in favour of the oppressed. Maybe, there will be a change of a figure for another one and some rules in the power structure but never abolish it because command and obedience are its essence. That is the reason why we do not support any army, any police or any privileged person that could use the force and the weapons against other people. Nationalism is not a position that anarchism supports because this one implies the defense of the interests of certain group of peoples, confined artificially in a nation-territory, and that believe that they are different and even better than others. We are enemies of any kind of privilege such as those by birth, race, culture, religion or place of birth. Furthermore, the unlucky his-

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www.nodo50.org/ellibertario (in spanish & english). On the english section of the website we will be posting English articles based around the anarchists perspective on issues in Venezuela and around Latin America.

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tory of the Venezuelan military structure talks by itself: it was institutionalized by the tyrant Gómez to beat the federalist aspirations of the regions; consolidated in its repressive vocation during the fight against the leftist insurrectional movements of the 1960's; executioner of the 1989 massacre.

Are the Venezuelan anarchists 'escuálidos' (squalids, nickname used by the chavism to call their opponents), and for that reason they support the social democracy and right opposition?

'Escuálido' is only a media category, disparaging in its official political use and with a smell of slogan that do not say anything about those which are described so. However, if they want to use this word for describing those that do not want to give in our freedom and autonomy to submit to the authoritarian imposition of a person, party or ideology, then we do are. However, if with that word we mean that we support ideologies identified with economic liberalism, with the quasi-racist contempt of the elites for the majorities, with the swindle of the representative democracy or the return of forms of socio-political organization beaten by history, then, we are not. In fact, we do not support Chávez or their electoral competitors; we can agree with some of the actions of ones and others, with some discourses of any of them, but in-depth we criticize the majority of the actions and discourses of all of them. We refuse the continuous frustration of the hopes of the people that has supported Chávez, but we also refuse to validate the demagoguery tactics of the opportunist ghetto of those who function as their institutional opposition. And, the most important, due to our principles, we cannot support to those who bases the quest for a better life in any kina of subordination of the people to the State hierarchy as both factions do.

There are peoples that consider themselves as libertarians but support the Chávez process. If we consider them as less anarchists, it would be an argument against the anti-dogmatic spirit of anarchism?

Anarchism is not a state of the soul. It is a way to confront the changing social conditions seeking the welfare of everyone in the context of the welfare of all, with proposals that emerge from concrete peoples and those are discussed, taken or refused by the people in certain spatial-time circumstances. Anybody could call themselves as anarchism because we do not have neither a card nor a baptize that identifies us. Only the mutual interaction identifies us and only the other anarchists are who identifies us as anarchists or not due to our behavior or ideas. However, we are not perfect and for that reason, we can adopt ideas that would not be identified with the acceptable ideas. This fact does not make us more or less but only different and, in some cases, the ideas are so different in ones and others that the mutual identification get lost.

Anarchists only talk without contributing. What is the proposal to transform positively the current Venezuelan reality?

Our struggle is not a matter of the situation or the circumstances, but for a new way of life that we have to adopt for the individual and collective life, where direct action and self-management allow our existence to be in our own hands, sincerely and honestly, studying some matters and in the way we related to the others, male and female, respecting the equity and our difference that does not make us better than the rest, taking always into account that our existence is thanks to other people, whose interests we have to attend with priority to be able to attend ours, those that we have not to give up because we want to live a good life. Everybody lives his/her life and is responsible for it before oneself and the others, but anybody cannot assume our 'salvation'. That is the reason why it does not exist a recipe made for a particular social reality or for another one, because the proposals and actions to transform it have to be a result of a aware and continuous collective effort we try to contribute with our cheerful participation, promoting and empowering the recovery of the autonomy of the social

movements of the country where it will be possible the necessary space of tension for the development and influence of the anarchist ideas of freedom, and equity in solidarity.

El Libertario: What it is and how you can participate

El Libertario is a bi-monthly publication, who has been published 49 issues since November 1995, inspired by the antiauthoritarian ideal of anarchism and promoted by an affinity group opened to the participation and collaboration of people with libertarian leanings, as long as there is always an atmosphere free of sectarianism and of mutual respect. The central criterion of the affinity group is that we share the anarchist or libertarian ideal, whose aim is the creation of a society based on direct democracy, social justice, self-management, mutual aid and the free contract without the authoritarian imposition of neither the law or the force.

Each issue is made with the voluntary cooperation of those of us who believe it is important to circulate a pedagogical voice of counter-information, which is autonomous, without receiving any subsidies from any structure of power, and on the free agreement of those who are members of it. You are invited to become part of this experience. Here there are no leaders nor bosses, instead there is a learning process and a permanent debate to fortify an horizontal and antiauthoritarian network of social action to change things. We are trying to inform about the theory and action of the anarchists in Latin America and the entire world, but also to support all libertarian factors present in social movements in our compass.

We do not receive — nor do we want to — any types of subventions from State organizations or any other power institution. Our activities are self-managed 110%. Because of this, one of the central task of El Libertario is its own distribution and its self-financing.

For contacts via snail mail, write to us (preferably in Spanish) to:

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