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The Sexual Revolution

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2005 (1934)

Felix Marti Ibanez (1913–1972) was a doctor active in the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist trade union federation, the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (the CNT). The following excerpts are from his article, “Eugenics and Sexual Morality. The Sexual Revolution,” originally published in *Estudios*, 135, November 1934. The translation is by Richard M. Cleminson of the University of Leeds, author of *Anarchism, Science and Sex: Eugenics in Eastern Spain, 1900–1937* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000). It is published here with his kind permission.

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We recognize that the revolutionary subversion of contemporary social life will be the basis of a new state of things.

But beneath the revolutionary slogans, under the new order, many of the disgraceful social disorders which afflict us today will persist. And the sexual aspect may be included here.

I imagine that some will find this statement ill-advised. But let us pause and think. Sexual freedom and the liberal criteria as far as sexuality is concerned are things which affect the deepest and most hidden spiritual side of the personality. Things

so intimate and so personal that a simple change in social reality may do little when confronted by our deepest biological tendencies...

It is precisely the sexual prejudices that are the most difficult to banish. This is because sex and life itself are mixed up in the final analysis-just as sex and death are united in our amorous tribulations.

The ideological orientation of social, political, economic or scientific matters is easily changed. An eloquent example is given by politicians and scientists, by those who abandon what seemed to be firmly held ideas in order to adopt others, just as the snake sheds its old skin to bask in its new multi-coloured vestment in the light of the sun.

But the sexual life of man is not easily changed. The sexual tendencies are what provide the motor behind many ideological stances and actions of man. This, today, is an unquestionable truth, without necessarily accepting the extremes of Freud who makes the libido the mother of all human activity. Sexual practices, which stem from the mysterious complexities of the organism, from the intimate dynamics of the cells, are changed with great difficulty. In any case, they cannot be altered through external imposition, by the mandates of a Catholic or Communist State, because in order to change them they have to have undergone a previous process of evolution. For this reason, the collective sexual revolution, the social liberation from the laws and dogmas which today bind sexuality, will never manage to implement the individual sexual revolution. State imposition, just as it was not able to kill off the desire for sexual liberation harboured by many, will not be able to twist the sexual destiny of those who live their love lives pleasurably although surrounded by the dominant hypocrisy...

The sexual question cannot be resolved by a revolution, at least not by a rapid, theatrical, ostentatious revolution. The sexual revolution must be begun now; it must forge itself system-

atically and without interruption, “unhurried, but without a pause, like a star,” as Goethe said. Sexuality cannot be dominated and channelled by some hastily written decree, drawn up on the barricades of victory; it needs to be preceded by an evolutionary process.

The great revolutions were never made in a violent and sudden manner, like the marionette that pops out of the hatch in a puppet theatre, but were the mature fruit of a long evolutionary process. They have been mined as a mole digs its lair, not in a lion’s leap.

To believe that a violent revolution, which falls from the sky like a thunder bolt on to society, can destroy old oppressions and create a new, liberal state of things is an act of tremendous ingenuousness. This would be to accept the old version of History, which thought of itself in the romantic mode—a history of heroes and leaders, conquests and revolutions. But if it is judged serenely, History can be seen to be a scientific process, a collective History of labour, where peoples and collectives have substituted the romantic fighters and where revolutions have been replaced by creative evolution.

It is in this evolutionary cycle, as beads on a piece of string, that revolutionary processes are woven together. By this I mean authentic revolutionary processes, full of consequences. It is these that have been preceded by long evolutionary prologues. The other revolutions, those that have not been based on firm historical preparation, those revolutions which have emerged spontaneously, without the long process of fermentation, have been violent episodes with no further historical import.

And so some norms for application to the sexual sphere become apparent. Any pretended sexual revolution is a myth if by this it is understood as a violent revolutionary change in collective sexuality. Revolutions and the sexual revolution in particular, should not be something theatrical and ostentatious, an apotheosis of revolutionary decrees imposing free love. It

should be a revolution made off-stage, which is where the constructive and historical part of the revolution takes place.

The sexual revolution, the supreme liberation of collective sexuality, should be the humble silent task of a phalanx of tenacious fighters, who by means of the book, the word, the conference and personal example, create and forge that sexual culture which is the key to liberation.

That is the real Revolution, what Reclus called “revolutionary evolution,” in which the historical process advancing towards sexual freedom takes place without interruption. It is a process of evolution whereby the revolution filters through to all aspects of public life; it is present in all instants and in everything, like a day to day advancement towards the Ideal.

In this profound revolution, much more profound than passing episodes of violence, violent revolutions will only come when there is an insuperable obstacle placed in the way of Humanity’s route towards progress. Then the river spontaneously becomes a torrent, sweeps away the obstacle, and returns to its path once more. Revolution and evolution are thus reconciled. But this tactic, which eliminates as far as possible the use of violence, which is the weapon of the weak, demands a high awareness of the duties and responsibilities of the sexual freedom that we advocate. It is important to realize that if we are proposing to destroy a form of morality and substitute for it another, the first thing to do is to show how honourable our attitude towards love and our moral stance towards sexuality both are.

We have in our hands the soft clay of new generations, with which we need to mould the figures of new people, to blow into that clay the breath of freedom and the understanding of the duties it brings with it. It is only in this way that we shall lift love out of the mire which surrounds it today, so that it can raise itself up in elegant flight towards the bright light of freedom. (Translation by Richard M. Cleminson)