

Towards a Modern Expropriative Strategy

GusselSprouts

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Part of my belief in Anarchist-Communism is that I believe we can achieve communization through direct expropriation. Anyone can destroy private property (and this is not a critique of that tactic) but our attempts at expropriating it prove much more difficult. It is not through the destruction of private property that we will abolish it, but the complete and final expropriation of it. Sometimes we feel so hopeless and defeated that only destruction can serve to boost morale, in the “propaganda of the deed”. I understand and sympathize with that sentiment, so I will not dismiss it. However, I am obliged to say that *expropriation is the purist and highest expression of direct action*, in the way that it is so much more than expression, unlike many other attempts which struggle to materialize into more.

Expropriation is not Syndicalist nor Insurrectionist. It is neither Platformist or Anti-organizational. It is not some agenda of Communists that post-leftists don't concern themselves with. Expropriation is the duty of every revolutionary. In many ways, Expropriation is the revolution in pure essence. Everything we do to attack the system is hope that we may reclaim the capital accumulated and controlled violently by the capitalist, and that we may return such to the commons until it is in surplus.

Kropotkin in his essay *Expropriation*:

“The landlord owes his riches to the poverty of the peasants, and the wealth of the capitalists comes from the same source.”

Expropriation and the Syndicalist Strategy

The syndicalist does not have to be told that expropriation is at the core of their strategy. Their devotion and fearless attempts to seize production from the capitalist and claim it for the workers, is the goal. A syndicalist will tell you that in a class-war, whomever controls production gets the goods. Best that be the workers, obviously!

Gregori Maximov, a Russian anarcho-syndicalist during the 1917 Russian Revolution, says of expropriation, in *Programme of Anarcho-Syndicalism*:

“In manufacturing and in some branches of the primary industries, capitalism has thus already prepared the ground for Communism and the syndicalisation of industry by the expropriation of capitalists and the State — today the imperative and the only feasible solution to the workingman's problem. Socialised labour facilitates this transition to communist ownership by way of syndicalisation.”

He then goes on to talk about differences in the expropriation of agricultural property vs. industrial production. There is obviously differences there and there will subsequently be a different strategy for that front of expropriation. I am an urbanite however, and any expropriation done around agriculture will be building new permaculture on urban land which had been previously owned (usually owned by the city or real-estate capitalists, and usually serving as the jumping blocks for gentrification). I live in one of the few larger cities that is very lawn-heavy, even in the most densely populated areas.

The syndicalist knows that class war becomes reality whenever the time comes for the defense of that which has been expropriated. Where in which agitation has become attack, and revolutionary self-defense becomes war, syndicalism calls for workers to defend what is theirs until the bloody end.

The mode of organization employed by syndicalists also ensures that expropriation is done in such a way that it involves those who have the highest stake in it. There is no agenda of an intellectual vanguard far away, who has their own plan for that which you have expropriated. Syndicalists are fighting for theirs, and defend it in such ways. When I say “theirs”, I know we are talking about the only legitimate property, that of use and possession by workers and not the capitalist in absentia.

Expropriation and the Insurrectionist Strategy

Luigi Galleani, in *The End of Anarchism?*:

“The anarchists, like the socialists, want and urge the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, but they do not hope at all for its generosity nor its philanthropy and justice. Confronted with the violent pressure of the masses trying to overthrow it, the bourgeoisie throws out each day a little of its ballast; it gives up some of its arrogance or it makes some inane concession — paid holidays, laws protecting women and working children, state medicine, etc, but only for the purpose of saving its bankrupt privileges.

That is their business: *reforms remain — and should remain — a concern and a function of the ruling class*, not of the anarchists, nor of the socialists either, if they are sincerely convinced that the expropriation of the ruling class is an inevitable condition of their economic emancipation.”

Say what you will about the Galleanists, the man himself had some good stuff to say about expropriation. We cannot expect for the ruling class to simply relinquish their power. We mean war when we say class warfare. We cannot afford to concern ourselves the *liberal-bourgeois morality* (the form of morality that makes one have human sympathy with private property, and to see violence in it’s destruction or expropriation)

Traditionally, Insurrectionists have engaged in forms of expropriation of a slightly more direct nature. Galleani outlines dozens of bank robberies and check frauds, done by insurrectionists to further the causes of the movements. Unfortunately, there are few English resources on the subject, but anyone who has read a biography of Buenaventura Durruti knows that he and several groups (Los Solidarios included) engaged in mass-scale expropriations for decades before the Spanish Civil War. This was not unique to Spain. From Argentina to Western Europe, we found no more appropriate sponsors for our revolution than those whom we call enemy. A personal favorite essay called “Illegal Anarchism” by Illegalist Gustavo Rodriguez, mentions such expropriations at least 2 dozen times.

It goes without saying that our modern movement is not what it was when we performed such mass-scale armed expropriations. We are not positioned for such things, and given the police state currently deployed in the First-World we have largely assembled today, we need new strategy at the time being for Insurrectionists regarding expropriation.

Many other forms of expropriation do fit into this praxis however. The idea that someone, outside of an organization, can steal something for the ruling classes and return it to the people, is something rather limitless.

The Modern Expropriative Strategy

We find ourselves in a very interesting development with the recent establishment of Solidarity Networks. This unique mode of worker's organization attacks issues of housing, labour and poverty with a more direct action approach with an emphasis on both mutual-aid but also attack and agitation. Remember that carry out expropriations is not as difficult as defending them against reaction. These Solidarity Networks provide an amazing resource for defense of this. They get to the nitty-gritty of grassroots neighborhood organizing.

The popularity of illegalism (and therefore expropriation) can be seen throughout modern Anarchist culture rather ubiquitously. The good Anarchist always thinks of the resources they can steal for their project first. This is important. We know we cannot win by playing by the rules of the ruling class, or by appealing to their morality (propertarian humanization). The Anarchist strategy around housing (known by many as squatting) and also urban gardening on unused/abandoned property (guerrilla gardening) are a very good examples of resource expropriation.

I don't need to remind anyone that we have 22 empty houses for every homeless person in America. It goes without saying that even in the first world we have a huge disparity of wealth, as well as a world ripe for expropriation. Every Anarchist organization could potentially have a headquarters, which can also serve as something to help the community. Squatters laws are complicated indeed, but you would be surprised to find they aren't as difficult to work with. Also, expropriation of this sort is quite the *attack* even if eviction is served in the end. Making the state waste a ton of resources (dozens of work hours for Lawyers, amongst other things) in order to carry out the eviction, you have the state rushing to keep their end of the deal with the capitalist. Pit them against eachother and you'll find much of our work being done for us. For every squat that falls, we find victory in such defeat, and also expropriate 2 more.

The strategy of Expropriation is something that ideally should fit into any Anarchist Praxis. It should be a part of every agenda, there should be a campaign in every neighbourhood. Our enemies are vastly skilled at stealing from the working class, and accumulating wealth. We should employ the same vigor.

The Stages of Expropriation

It goes without saying that when we expropriate, we are playing for keeps. This seems to be well understood, but let me explain what I mean by such and why I think it's important. Nothing can be considered fully expropriated until it has not only been seized from the capitalist, and not only given to the people for free and common use. Something that has reached the final stage of expropriation cannot be taken by force and re-privatized. When something has reached the final stage of expropriation, it no longer needs defense from counter-revolution or reaction.

Kropotkin, once again, in his essay *Expropriation*:

“We found not have the revolutionary impulse arrested in mid-career, to exhaust itself in half measures, which would content no-one, and which while producing a tremendous upheaval of society, and stopping its customary activities, would have no power of life in themselves, and would merely spread general discontent and inevitably prepare the way for triumph of reaction.”

This is why expropriation demands strategy and science within the Anarchist praxis. We all too often come under attack for our lack of this. Some will say Anarchism can never have such qualities. Some are very intent that it doesn't. Some would call such people privileged and naïve. One thing is true and quite evident, we will never build a revolution on idealistic dreams and well-wishes. I do think, with new modes of organization and the modern elasticity of Anarchism (some would say that has had consequences, which I am liable to agree with) such science and strategy is within our reach.

So let us embrace the place Anarchism has given us loose ends, the places where other revolutionary ideologies have reach dead ends. These are our gift!

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