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La Alzada: “The revolution must include the feminist struggle, with and inside the libertarian”

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

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Over the last two decades, Chile has experienced the flourishing of diverse libertarian initiatives within Chile. The gender question and the feminist struggle has been a weaker element in comparison to the development of other fronts. The late development of anarcha-feminism is surprising given the nation’s conservatism where divorce was legalized recently [in 2003]. Despite it all, various initiatives have been made, even though short lived: the Sucias [Dirty Women] collective in 2011, followed by the Libertarian Gender Collective. These collectives problematized the gender question that marked native libertarian movement and thought. Within this framework, libertarian activists have exchanged and debated ideas that have led to an explicit and radical critique of patriarchy. La Alzada, Libertarian Feminist Action, came out of these experiences and the organization shall be made public

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March 9th [of 2013] in Santiago, Chile. We have maintained an interesting dialogue with the comrades of this group to deepen and better understand their vision as their libertarian positions mature. We wish them lots of success in their endeavor of contributing—from the trenches—a more radical transformation of our oppressive and authoritarian society.

Note from translator: The word “alzada” is the feminine form of the Spanish word that means rebel, instigator, or escalator. The term “territorial work” refers to community and neighborhood work. In Chile territorial work can refer to community organizations within, as well as those who support and offer solidarity within a network of community organizing. The word “classism” or classist is used in Latin America as putting forward a class analysis. When someone is described as a “militant,” it means that a person is politically committed to an organization or group. Sometimes people are referred to as a “double militants,” meaning they are politically active in two groups. The word “población” is best defined as shantytown or poor working class neighborhood. But poblaciones around Santiago have their own political history since they evolved as land takeovers by people who migrated from the countryside to the city. Some poblaciones have strong political and Leftist traditions, such as La Legua and Villa Francia. An individual who lives in a población is referred to as a pablador/a. The term “sexual dissidence” has a particular meaning and genealogy within Chilean feminism and activism. Sexual dissidence is critique of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and the LGBTQ movement in its alliance with the state, which has ceased to question the socialization of violence and instead seeks reforms such as marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws. It is important to remind the reader that the target audience in this interview was the Spanish-speaking community and those who understand or have followed Chilean politics. There are some

La Alzada, Acción Feminista Libertaria.
March, 2013

issues and terms that might appear strange, but remember that the speakers allude to a different set of experiences and meanings beyond your immediate/lived knowledge.

–Lyudmila

1. Why form a libertarian feminist group? Do you think the gender question is not sufficiently taken up by libertarian organizations?

Our main motivation in forming La Alzada, Libertarian Feminist Action, was due to a need to deepen feminist thought within various socio-political spaces we function in. We felt that a gender and feminist struggle perspective was not being reflected upon in an adequate way. In this sense, more than just anarcha-feminists, we put forward a libertarian vision. In an equal manner, we note the need to revalorize women who are exploited and dominated by the capitalist and patriarchal system. The issue of sexual dissidence is a fundamental question included in this perspective, since the capitalist order defends a family structure that is patriarchal, authoritarian, and heteronormative. In our struggle for freedom, we also fight against a culture that does not include lesbians, transsexuals, and homosexuals.

Many anarchist and Leftist organization with revolutionary intent attempt to revalorize women, especially working-class women as doubly exploited. Most of the time it doesn't go farther than a pamphlet, which doesn't create a concrete praxis. From the subordination of women to control over our body to a critique of the family—such issues are be part of the propaganda of various newsletters, articles, and bulletins within the broader fights of anarchism. However, these will matter little if we do not deepen our [political] positions. The idea of “the emancipation of women” becomes stale without the inclusion of a feminist framework within those same organizations. The

creation of La Alzada outlines the necessity for two jobs: on the one hand, we have a responsibility within libertarian spaces and, on the other hand, the need to reach out and do territorial work from a gender perspective within those social and public spaces.

As an organization, we have seen the need for libertarian-feminism to take a leading role in poblaciones and community spaces. This will allow us to deepen feminism in a more concrete form. Fighting not only against the oppression of women within the patriarchal system, but also against the social marginalization of people living their sexuality in a different way from the social dominant model; where there is no room for same-sex couples and people assigned men who want to be women and vice versa.

Territorial work represents a major challenge when we incorporate the feminist struggle with the revolutionary project. We believe that it is a difficult task, but we take on that political commitment to libertarian-feminism as our project; to contribute to the revolution not only in the streets, work and study spaces, but also within homes and families.

2. The dominant position of the Left has been that after the revolution many problems will be solved and we can then think about what to do with women, minorities, etc. While that mindset is not dominant within anarchism, it nevertheless exists. As libertarian-feminists, how do you articulate the feminist struggle against the state? Do you place feminism a priority within libertarianism or vice versa?

The Communist Manifesto argues that after the revolution, problems of domination will be solved magically. There the family and marriage are questioned and women will occupy a place in a “future classeless society.” The Left then placed the fight against the subjugation of woman as secondary to class struggle. But the revolution does not guarantee anything. Fifty-seven years before Marx and Engels published the Communist

Furthermore, it is important to remember that this fight is also their [men] fight because although institutional feminist thought has a tendency to consider women as “victims,” men also suffer oppression from the social model of gender. From an early age, when social roles are being constructed through educational and cultural socialization, a social model is imposed upon women, as well as men. It is imposed for men to be strong, virile, heterosexual, prohibited from showing their emotions, etc.

Of course this patriarchal social model places men in an advantageous position over women. However, we fundamentally consider it essential that this struggle not be limited to women, but as a vindication for everyone; for a free and conscious construction of gender and sexual orientation outside the constraints of capitalism and patriarchy.

6. What are the objectives of your organization so far?

The purpose of La Alzada is to significantly contribute to the abolition of patriarchy from a revolutionary perspective. To do this, our overall objective is to contribute to the reconstruction of the social fabric from a feminist and libertarian viewpoint. In integrating sexual dissidence, libertarian feminism assumes an emancipatory role with all those who are discriminated, exploited, oppressed due to their gender and/or sex.

In addition, we intend to take an active role in the development of a praxis that promotes feminism in an extensive way within Chilean social consciousness. As a first step within the popular sectors; followed by reflection and discussion within organizations of the revolutionary Left. Finally, we contribute to the development and enrichment of the feminist gaze in social spaces. Through critical and libertarian analysis, we will instill in daily activity of theoretical contributions that we plan to develop in the future.

Thank you.

various feminist organizations, Juntas de Vecinos (Neighborhood Councils), Centros de Madres (The Center for Mothers), Comités de Allegados (Aid Committee), Deudores Habitacionales (Housing Debtors), and so on. These are examples of popular organized spaces that counted on important female presence, far from political officialism [state/institutional]. We aim to work with, for, and as working-class woman and pobladoras.

Finally, although Chile is a fairly conservative country, especially after the regression made during the era of dictatorial rule, the machismo problem is widespread in our society that transcends, including Leftist groups. For this reason, it is important that as a libertarian-feminist we reposition the struggle from a gender perspective, noting that is not only female presence that is needed. We also demand equal, dignified, just treatment, generating awareness about our position, pointing to the patriarchal structure as a whole.

5. What are the main obstacles for your organization? Do you feel supported by male libertarians?

The biggest obstacle is germinating from nothing. We see before us the need to build something from our principles, as well as active and collective participation to define agreements, claims, work plans, and insertion with all our activities. But there is also a high degree of interest and commitment to solidify and create this project. The challenge of bringing together female comrades from across the capital [Santiago], workers, students, militants, and individuals from different organizations have appeared as trivial problems in the momentum given to building La Alzada.

As for the men, not only have we been supported but we have also integrated them into our group. We have a clear awareness of the importance of sexual life, family in shaping the social order, and we are certain that for everyone the emancipation of women is an essential aspect in the process of social revolution.

Manifiesto, Mary Wollstonecraft published *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Olympe de Gouges wrote *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*. Both discussed their deep disappointment that the French Revolution did not bring substantial changes to the social conditions and place of women. The bourgeois revolution and the proletarian revolution will not give women, lesbians, gays, trans* political space without it being built.

As a libertarian we reject this magical way of thinking. Things do not come from heaven to be poured upon the face of the earth, permeating the world with justice; every right gained is a struggle. We reject economic determinism because we understand the multiplicity and the various forms of systemic domination. We take distance from the Marxist concept of taking state power and instead propose a profound transformation of society. We have to transform the relations of production and the economic system, as well as the cultural and sexual, eliminating from them power relations. In this regard, we point to a revolutionary transformation of society that must contain a radical and profound framework: a gender and feminist perspective of struggle. We believe that our work should be developed with and from the libertarian, not a priority over anarchism, but as a necessary relationship if our goal is to build a society where freedom and equality are actually for us all.

3. A very thorny issue within the emergence of “identity politics” is the dismissal of class struggle over other struggles such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, etc. Within traditional classism the opposite phenomenon occurs in which all other forms of oppression are seen as secondary to a vision of the class, mainly from an economic perspective. How do you articulate classism within feminism?

The political tradition of the Left, including the discourse and practice of the feminist movement, has made us think in

a binary form about class and gender. Thus we have a class analysis on the one hand, and on the other, an analysis of gender oppression. One was born from an analysis of economic exploitation and the other has a social and cultural origin. Choosing one over the other in an exclusionary form has its advantages and disadvantages. Both paths describe a range of discourse and forms of organizing. An array of feminists put forward proposals oriented in transforming the dominant system that objectifies women as a social category. A class analysis perspective states that the category of gender is subsidiary to the category of class; that class determines over gender and that only a change in the dominant mode of production can we break down gender inequalities.

We, like anarchism, compliment these analytical matrices and with it recognize the legacy of our comrades who took and take up the fight for revolution. Including those who demanded inclusion into spaces they were denied involvement. That is how female comrades over the last two decades did it—active women, strong, atheists, rebellious—and built it upon many pages, organizations, their own discourse, anarchist action, and feminism.

We are classists and libertarians committed to building feminist politics, demystifying this system based on exploitation, patriarchal domination, and heteronormativity. We believe that this struggle must be coupled. We are currently building a social force that comes forward as the organized pueblo to expropriate from the bourgeoisie the means of production. We are also currently developing feminist consciousness centered around a critique of how our organizations relate and interpersonal relationships, oriented not in creating “parity” but the new world of Durruti.

4. What does it mean to be a libertarian feminist in a conservative country like Chile? Do you feel that society has advanced in recent years? So there was a female president....

From the point of view of the rights of women, it is clear that in the last century gains have been made that were previously viewed as unreachable such as education and suffrage, as some pragmatic examples. However, we also know that it is within the context of capitalist and bourgeois democracy, which has generated advances in integrating women in public spaces, introduction into workspaces, and bringing them into a system that subjugates and exploits them further over their status of workingwomen. Furthermore, transsexuals, bi/homosexuals, and lesbians are denied adequate health services. We are consumed by a social education that is authoritarian, patriarchal, heteronormative, and, consequently, profoundly repressive.

Being a feminist in Chile today presents a major challenge. Just as we mentioned above and the fact that we had a female president and surely such a scenario could be repeated. Apparently, for the simple fact that some women may have access to areas of power, issues such as sexism, gender violence, reproductive rights, the triple shifts, machismo, etc...should be resolved.

In our country, the condition of being a woman and being in positions of power has not been and will not guarantee change. As libertarians we believe that the capitalist system and patriarchal structure harbors injustice, like those described above. Only a real, profound, and popular transformation can be an effective force for change. That is why we aim to build a new way of understanding and practicing politics. Not only for the abolition from bourgeois political spheres, but also within groups and Leftist organizations.

From La Alzada, we attempt to relate to spaces that have been abandoned by the dominant structures. That is how women have played an historical role, yet often forgotten or hidden from official history. Popular organizations have seen their fair share of female leaders. In the case of Chile, the struggle against the dictatorship counted on the support by