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On revolutionary discipline

Nestor Makhno

1926

Comrades have asked me the following question: how do I understand revolutionary discipline? I will answer it.

I understand revolutionary discipline as a self-discipline of the individual, established in an acting collective, in an equal manner for all, and strictly worked out.

It must be the responsible line of conduct of the members of this collective, leading to a strict agreement between its practice and its theory.

Without discipline in the organization, it is impossible to undertake any serious revolutionary action whatsoever. Without discipline, the revolutionary vanguard cannot exist, because then it would find itself in complete practical disunity and would be incapable of formulating the tasks of the moment, of fulfilling the role of initiator expected of it by the masses.

I base this question on the observation and experience of a consistent revolutionary practice. For my part, I base myself on the experience of the Russian revolution, which carried within it a typically libertarian content in many respects.

If the anarchists had been closely linked on the organizational level and had observed a well-defined discipline in their actions,

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they would never have suffered such a defeat. But, because the anarchists “of all stripes and tendencies” did not represent, even in their specific groups, a homogeneous collective with a well-defined discipline of action, for this reason these anarchists could not bear the political and strategic examination that the revolutionary circumstances imposed on them. The disorganization led them to a political impotence, dividing them into two categories: the first were those who threw themselves into the systematic occupation of bourgeois houses, in which they lodged and lived for their well-being. They were the same as those I would call “tourists”, the various anarchists who go from city to city, hoping to find a place on the way to stay for a while, lazing around and staying there as long as possible to live in comfort and good pleasure.

The other category consisted of those who broke all honest ties with anarchism (although some of them, in the USSR, now pass themselves off as the only representatives of revolutionary anarchism) and threw themselves on the responsibilities offered by the Bolsheviks, even when the authorities shot the anarchists who remained faithful to their post as revolutionaries by denouncing the betrayal of the Bolsheviks.

Given these facts, one can easily understand why I cannot remain indifferent to the state of carelessness and negligence that currently exists in our circles.

On the one hand, this prevents the creation of a coherent libertarian collective, which would allow anarchists to occupy their rightful place in the revolution, and on the other hand, it allows one to be content with fine phrases and grand thoughts, while shirking the moment of taking action.

This is why I speak of a libertarian organization based on the principle of fraternal discipline. Such an organization would lead to the indispensable understanding of all the living forces of revolutionary anarchism and would help it to occupy its place in the struggle of Labor against Capital.

By this means, libertarian ideas can only win over the masses, and not become impoverished. Only empty and irresponsible chat-boxes can flee before such an organizational structure.

Organizational responsibility and discipline should not frighten: they are the traveling companions of the practice of social anarchism.