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The “Productor” & the Chicago Conference

Olivia Rossetti

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A series of articles has been appearing of late in our Spanish Comrade “El Productor”, under the title “Puritanism and exaggeration. They have been written in answer to a criticism by some Valencia comrades of an article which appeared in the “Productor” concerning the Chicago conferences, called “Shoulders to the wheel. As the Chicago conference is so near at hand it may be interesting to English comrades to hear what the opinion of Spanish Anarchists on the question of conference is.

In the disputed article, the “Productor” proposes that all Anarchists who agreed with the desirability of the Chicago Conference, should send in a voluntary subscription, accompanied by the name of the delegate whom they thought best suited to represent the Spanish Anarchists at the Conference; when these votes had all come in, they were to be collected, counted up and verified, and the men whose names had most supporters was to be sent to Chicago, with the money obtained by the subscriptions, there to give voice to the opinions and wishes of the Spanish groups, and to bring back

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to them an account of the proceedings and the conclusions arrived at.

To these propositions six Valencia comrades answered by a declaration, in which they state that while they fully realize the importance and undeniable advantage to be derived from the Chicago conference, they are completely opposed to the program put forward by the 'Productor,' which they denounce as opposed to the Anarchist principle, which denies the possibility of one man representing another, under any circumstances. Especially do they object to a subscription being required as an accompaniment to a vote, declaring that even the Bourgeois governments are seeing the absurdity of a money qualification. To these objections the 'Productor' replies by saying that it does not consider that the question of the best way for the Spanish Anarchists to take part in a conference is in any sense a matter of principle, which it defines as a fundamental basis, but a matter of convenience. It states that it does not consider the idea of representation to be opposed to Anarchy; that it is only so when applied as it is by our existing Bourgeoise society, and it asks if any one would maintain that it would be contrary to Anarchist principles if, after the revolution, several groups wishing to confer together on points of common interest, and it being impossible for all the members of the said group to meet together to discuss, they should each choose delegates to set forth the opinions of their comrades, and afterwards announce the result of the conference so that the different groups might come to some common understanding, provided the delegates received no authority to enforce their decisions. As to the money qualification, the 'Productor' says, that as they made the subscription entirely voluntary, that is to say that it might consist of 1 centime or 50frs., it did not think that it would be an obstacle to any one's voting; but, of course, it says, if any one should be found in so destitute a condition as not to be able to afford eve a centime, he would be allowed to give his vote without a subscription.

This seems a dangerous method to establish, savouring rather of the method in vogue in Bourgeoise society of remedying present evils by charities in various forms. But, of course, it is true enough that people as a rule are very disinclined to produce money unless some pressure is supplied, and there would be very few cases in which it would be impossible to give a half-penny or a farthing; the other objections as to verifying votes, etc., disappear if we once invade the first two points.

The Valencia Anarchists say that their idea of what an Anarchist conference should be is that any Anarchist who feels inclined to go should go; that he should go on no one's behalf and represent no one but himself; that the Anarchists thus assembled should discuss for their own benefit any subjects they feel inclined to, and by thus strengthening themselves individually, they would ultimately strengthen the cause, and they point to the Paris congress as a beau ideal of an Anarchist conference. The 'Productor' answers this by asking if a single object was attained, or result arrived at by the Paris congress, and replies in the negative. It therefore concludes that if the expense of going to Chicago is to be stood, it must be compensated by substantial results, and that this can only be the case if a plan something like the one they suggested be adopted.

It is to be regretted that the articles on both sides have been written in a spirit of active antagonism, most unfortunate among Anarchists when a mere point of tactics is under discussion. Surely Anarchists should be the first to respect free individual initiative in such matters, and if one set of comrades wish to send a delegate to a conference, others should surely not require them to retract on pain of declaring them not to be Anarchists and vice versa.

To overthrow our present society means that we have such a tremendous and varied work to do, that there is surely room for every description of method and propaganda, and no time should be wasted in trying to compel others to adopt one's own special line.

We are Anarchists because we recognize that all men are different, and that it is desirable that they should be so; let us put this principle into practice, and no more waste our time in trying to lord it over some one else.