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Collectivism and Communism

Anarchists in Spain

Ricardo Mella

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Some friends tell me that it would be useful for this work to be followed by a short summary explaining the mutual positions of the communist- and collectivist-anarchist parties in Spain, that latter sort of anarchism being almost unknown outside our country. Here, it appears, collectivism is readily confused with statist socialism and it would be difficult to explain how one could be collectivist and anarchist at the same time.

For the comrades who were part of the old International, such an explanation is useless, for anarchist collectivism is a remembrance of the principles of that association. Anarchists then called themselves collectivists, just like the Marxists. The idea of free communism was only formulated later and Spain is a country where it only penetrated long after. The old Federation of laborers, affiliated with the International, called itself anarchist and collectivist and followed in its totality the tendency of Bakunin from the time of the rupture at the Hague. It remained anarchist and collectivist even after the dissolution of the International.

In 1882 and at the Seville Congress [1883], the idea of communism was put forward for the first time. The Congress decided against the rather authoritarian tendency characteristic of that idea.

Naturally, anarchist collectivism differs a great deal from Marxist collectivism, with none of the statist organization or the remuneration granted by directing organs of the latter. The collectivists affirm the necessity of organizing, by means of free agreements, large productive federations, so that neither production nor distribution are left to chance, but are the result of the combination of forces and the indications of statistics. Anarchist collectivism anarchist does not accept the communist principle of distribution: *To each according to their needs*, and while in the beginning it affirmed the principle: *To each according to their works*, at present it is content to leave it that individuals and groups will resolve the problem of distribution, with the help of freely established conventions, in accordance with their tendencies, their necessities and the state of their social development. Ultimately, anarchist collectivism aspires to the spontaneous organization of society by means of free agreement, without asserting processes, or a necessary result. In this sense, the present tendency of those who call themselves anarchists without any adjective, is also a recollection of collectivism.

Anarchist communism in Spain differs from collectivism in that it denies all organization for the present and for the future. Exaggerating the conclusions of the communism of other countries, doubtless because of the collectivist antagonism, it arrives at the affirmation of absolute individualism. Particularly in some cities of Andalusia and Catalonia, the communists are completely opposed to all organized action. For them, one will only have to produce as one wished, and take what is necessary from the heap; they think that in the present every alliance, every agreement is noxious. Really, that sort of communism is the result of a very great ignorance of the question

aggravated by a good dose of doctrinal dogmatism. Naturally there are some very conscious communists in Spain who take account of the difficulties and of the importance of the problem of distribution, but with them, as with the cool-headed collectivists, there is no reason to start up a polemic, for there are in agreement on many points. Other than that, we can say that communism in Spain is too elementary, too simple to be presented as a complete conception of the future society. Collectivism and communism suffer from the evil that inevitably derives from every prolonged polemic: exaggeration and doctrinal fanaticism.

It may be that the exaggeration of method in collectivism produces the atomistic exaggeration in communism, which reduces social life to the absolute independence of the individual, and vice versa. Nevertheless, without the antagonism of the two schools the whole different would be reduced to a simple question of words; but at present the two tendencies are irreducible, on the one hand the necessity of organizing all of social life and, on the other, the assertion that by producing and consuming aimlessly, as each desires, we give up the social harmony we desire.

In the details and in questions of process, the two parties differ still more, to the point that the organ of Marxist socialism in Spain (which calls itself equally communist, and collectivist) can maintain, and not without reason, that the anarchists waste their time debating the quintessence of a future that no one can determine in advance or *à priori*.

That is all that I wanted to say about the respective positions of the two parties or schools, within the narrow limits of the work that follows.