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Winter 2014

Retrieved on 6/19/2016 from http://www.non-fides.fr/?A-flourishing-movement-a-laboratory-of-repression-Interview-with-a-Mexican
Translated from french in *Return Fire*, vol.3 (UK), from *Des Ruines*, n°1. https://desruines.noblogs.org/

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milieu or “counter-cultures”, technology, commerce, cooperatives and “self-managed projects”, management of collective spaces like the Che occupation. Because for the most part of these questions, the positions and practices of anarchists separate themselves still too little from the influence of the milieus of Leftists, reformists, etc. and occasionally leads to certain ambiguities. To strengthen the contacts and regular exchanges with the comrades of Spanish speaking countries. To leave the university milieu to which all the tendencies of anarchism still remain very confined and to continue on the direction the support of imprisoned comrades.

choacán to struggle against the presence of several cartels.. with quite an unclear articulation, the strong influence of landowners who arm their agricultural workers… in which we certainly see an attempt at capitalist recomposition of the regions, although the movement isn’t limited to this.

1. Can you introduce yourself?

I align myself with an anarchism of revolt, of rage and action that leaves full scope for individual autonomy that, in general, [organised] structures know how to stifle so well. I have many doubts about organised anarchism and difficult relationships with it. In theory, I think that an organisation with clear anarchist principles (like the Spanish CNT [ed. – National Confederation of Labour, anarcho-syndicalist trade union]) can be a good tool. In practice, it’s obviously more complicated. In any case, it’s an eternal debate and there have always been points of contact between tendencies, more than we usually say.

In any case, I think that the existing organisations offer an anarchism that’s dusty, distant from action. As for me, I therefore remain committed to evolving, according to affinities with groups or conscious individuals, in maintaining an affirmed libertarian position, within social movements if there should be this work. Generally speaking, I consider that many current professions of anarchist radicalism are often smokescreens allowing them to make surprising leaps from the basic principles, and to display a beautiful demagoguery in the discourse and historical interpretation of their own movement.

While the re-appropriation and critical revaluation of anarchist history – the struggle against the demagogic discourses – are important issues, not in the aim of leaving people in total doubt (which is what so many professionals of pseudo-deconstruction do so well), but rather to clarify strong collective and individual perspectives, to struggle with more relevance and sharpen our weapons. These objectives can only be achieved through trusted libertarian relationships between individuals and by a discourse of rupture.

2. From here in France, we often hear more spoken about – and contacts are equally more numerous from – Chilean, Argentine or North American anarchism. Can you try to identify

some specificities and similarities of the Mexican movement with these other countries?

After the Magonista's defeat[1], the institutionalisation of the Mexican Revolution and the integration of the labor movement in the '20s, the Mexican anarchist movement of action had more or less disappeared. There was a certain libertarian revival from the '90s, particularly through the punk scene. The anarchist movement today consists of a fairly large number of collectives, mainly in a few big cities. Libertarian thought and practices are developing very rapidly and evoke a lot of interest.

As for the difference with other countries on the continent, the production of theory here is still very weak, without doubt due to anarchism oriented towards action being relatively new, the difficulty of getting a hold of materials, the absence of spaces to meet (they can be counted, for the country, on the fingers of one hand). There are many exchanges, discussion, and relationships between individuals and collectives of different tendencies (anarchist and anti-authoritarian): at the same time because the state of mind is very positive and open, and also, in my opinion, because the lines of these groups are still very vague. Relatively often, there are positions or actions that one could find to be very surprising in a country where an anarchist presence is more rooted, and sometimes very ambiguous things. In a country where the struggles are part of daily life, where the social movement is large and active, that knows a strong history of local resistance or guerrilla movements, there exists a real dynamism, of experience, a strong involvement of individuals on the ground. It seems to me that the primary specificity of Mexican anarchism is to be in its ties to communitarian struggles, in particular the region's indigenous peoples. With the recent furthering of the process of indigenous autonomy in the ma-

[1] ed. – Reference to a series of insurrections for 'Land & Liberty' leading into the Mexican Revolution, of which the part-indigenous (Zapotec) anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon was an instigator and intellectual contributor. The rebellions were betrayed by reformists, and Magon died in prison in the U.S.A.

There is a long history of battles between the university, Leftist organisations, and more-or-less self-managed and anarchist collectives for the management of this occupied space of UNAM, the largest university of the country, in Mexico City. This has manifested in the past, and again more recently, by very violent events (in February the anarchists there were attacked by a very well armed Leftist group). If it is evidently necessary to denounce these attacks (which was done), it seems to me equally necessary that the anarchist presence in such a large space poses numerous questions for us: it is situated in the university, implies a permanent presence (notably during the night), to permanently be on the lookout faced with the administration and its strategies of co-optation and infiltration or faced with other organisations, a working relationship with self-proclaimed self-managed groups who aren't necessarily clear on their practices and aims. What are the issues? On what basis? It seems to me that the defense of the space against the elements that would want to seize it often prevents that the question is asked on the basis of strategy. It's necessary to do this as to have a critical analysis of the organisation of the Informal Anarchic Days of December 2013[8].

9. What are, in your view, the most important objectives that anarchists in Mexico must give themselves?

Developing a critical analysis of the existent and some clearer anarchist positions in relation to the questions asked in the radical milieu: social movements (Zapatismo, autonomies, syndicalist struggles, self-defense groups[9], etc.), strong influence of the university

in Mexico City. [ed. – An estimated 300 shot down by military and police during a demonstration 10 days before the opening of the Olympic Games, in a country wracked by rising social tensions. The event is considered part of the Mexican Dirty War, when the government used its forces to outright suppress political opposition.]

[8] ed. – Comrades from as far away as Greece, England, U.S.A., Italy, and Chile attended the event, during which Cuban anarchist Gustavo Rodriguez was kidnapped by federal agents, tortured, interrogated and deported to the U.S.A.

[9] A complex "popular" movement recently emerged in the narco-state of Mi-

comrades arrested during the commemorative march of October 2nd[7] are awaiting their sentencing. It's clearly a matter of making examples. These cases add to the already very numerous cases of militants from diverse tendencies that are regularly imprisoned or assassinated. Nothing indicates a priori that this repression affects the growth of the movement, even if it can weaken certain groups. The country is used to a high level of repression, and individuals who frequent the revolutionary milieus understand these risks. On the whole, despite their disagreements (and the accusations mentioned above), the anarchists, thankfully, show much solidarity with prisoners.

7. To stay on a shitty subject, could you recount what happened when a false communique was issued about the so-called death of a comrade in Mexico? This non-event, a serious thing for me, provoked quite a few lively polemics, here and probably elsewhere as well. Also, a bit of time has passed, do you have more info today on the why and how (and who) of this somber story?

The matter remains very shady, and the members of the collective responsible for the diffusion of this false info rejected responsibility… without having clearly established what happened and explained their error. What this betrays, is above all a lack of experience and of principles in the internal workings of certain collectives, which manifests through, among other things, an unrestrained poorly controlled use of social networks. One imagines that this could contribute to other levels… The lack of responsibility of certain individuals unfortunately leaves the way to all speculations, especially knowing the degree of infiltration of anarchist milieus in Mexico.

8. Could you also tell use some thoughts on the Che Guevara occupation where international and informal anarchist gatherings took place some time ago?

[7] In reference to the massacre of students on October 2th, 1968 in Tlatelolco

jority of the regions of the country, these ties are strengthening. Which poses quite a few questions.

3. We can easily affirm with certainty, then, that the anarchist movement in Mexico is a young movement. I imagine that this implies both some qualities and some faults. We could, for instance, lament the lack of critical or theoretical analysis, which probably must be felt in practice. But on the other hand, Mexico being a particularly socially violent country, the level of violence that comes from the movement is very symptomatic of this. We could take as example the group Individualidades Tendiendo a lo Salvaje (ITS) which claimed assassinations of scientists[2], or several attacks signed by the FAI[3] or* [the Mexican chapter of] *the CCF[4] of which the level of intensity is probably higher than in the rest of the world. Thus, we find ourselves with an inverse situation to many countries, where the practical experimentation is much more developed than the more theoretical and sometimes detached. Could you share your feelings on this with us, and try to describe the reception that armed-struggle-ist theories could have amongst comrades?

It is certain that the practices suffer from the lack of theoretical analyses. It seems to me to be a fundamental point, even if things evolve and improve. There remains, in Mexico, including in the anarchist movement, a certain admiration for the movements of armed struggle of the guerrilla variety. These movements were very strong in the '70s-80s, and continue to exist, several which are active in the country. We sometimes find, in certain communiques of activist groups, some pronounced militarist emphasis a bit problematic for some anarchists. But in the majority of cases, these communiques more resemble those coming from [anarchists

[2] ed. – actually to date there has only been one confirmed fatality from actions they've claimed; see Return Fire vol.1 pg71

[3] ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg44

[4] ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg40

in] Greece or elsewhere. The case of ITS is a bit different: like they clearly say in a recent interview with Contra Info, they don't claim to be anarchist. And the possible comparisons stop there.

It doesn't seem to me that the social violence known to the country actually evolves the practices of the social movement or of the anarchist movement (taken as a whole) towards being more violent. These consequences are, however, important: infiltration, weakening or quasi-devastation of the centres of struggle in certain parts of the country. The insurrectionalist practices have only recently known a certain popularity, in the poor neighbourhoods of Mexico City for instance. There are probably, at least in part, a very logical response to the military occupation these neighborhoods (and the country in its entirety) are known for, where it is practically impossible to go for a walk without finding yourself in front of units of diverse and varied armed forces. And perhaps also to the recent establishment of narco-trafficers from cartels, who enormously weaken social links, make difficult collective struggle and favour clandestinity. The practice of violence is part of the Mexican social movement, and even more so indigenous communities. Armed communities are far from the exception. Their very solid 'formation' is born from diverse experiences (colonisation, the Mexican revolution, guerillas, etc) which makes their preparation and their capacity for action truly impressive. Which is why comrades frequently visit them and draw teachings from them.

4. In fact, in regards to the struggle of indigenous populations, they are rarely critical of nationalism, or the concepts of a "people", of "nation", of spiritual leaders or earthly leaders, who are however very often present in these communities. We know that numerous comrades, from South America to Canada, are implicated in their struggles, but don't always demonstrate a critical attitude towards these conceptions. Is this also the case in Mexico? And could you tell us more on this subject?

6. Exactly! There is the Mexican state who in this moment appears to have understood that anarchism is in process of quickly developing, and one saw quite a few instances of anti-anarchist repression pile up on each other these last months. Could you give us several clarifications and briefly summarise all these matters? We speak of the climate that this repression establishes among the comrades? And especially, do you think that this repression affects the growth of the movement, or the opposite?

There were so many cases in 2013 that it would be long to list them. Mexico is a true labratory of repression, and the state has a long experience of infiltration and co-optation of movements. For some time now, it particularly puts emphasis on the repression of anarchists: there are arrests during all the demonstrations, movements and important events (in addition to more targeted arrests), and often convictions. It is important to specify that the media regularly insist on the danger that the encapuchadxs (hooded ones) in the demonstrations represent, and one saw many times over different tendencies of the Left reproach them by their own account. The result of these politics is a certain stigmatisation of anarchists for their "violence"… There are several tensions between groups around the question of violent actions, a bit like elsewhere. And the same sectarian arguments are sometimes used against those who carry them out. It's true that the anarchist milieu, just as the rest of the social movement, is quite infiltrated. This doesn't justify the accusations of certain anarchists against the comrades, even if they may make errors or lack experience.

The most recent news to date is the extended detentions (despite the absence of proof against them and the legal limit of detention) of Mario "El Tripa" López and of Carlos, Fallon, and Amélie (accused of terrorism) [ed. – for more recent info, see 'Towards the Unknown']. Mario González was sentenced in January to five years and nine months of mandatory imprisonment for "attacks on the public order" [ed. – i.e. rioting; he is now free]. Eight [other]

I think that there is a lack of critical reflection among many anarchists, of all tendencies, on what could be encompassed in certain community demands. It seems to me that it is too common, that this exists for a long time in the movement, and that it touches the fairly taboo question of demagoguery: the need to get closer, to be involved in the struggles, often meaning a casualness concerning our own conceptions, a lack of affirmation of what we are and what we want, under the argument of opening, of solidarity with the oppressed, to not shock people, etc. It is essential, in my mind, to refine our analyses and our positions on this theme: to know what we support in the struggles and the demands, and what seems to be contrary to us to the idea of freedom, emancipation, etc. Indigenous communities make up perhaps the avant-garde of the Mexican social movement. The fact remains that numerous demands, conceptions and workings are problematic: identitarian demands, forms of traditional authority, idealisation of the community, internal inequalities, etc. Whether many hope to hide them or only mention them quickly to minimise the effects doesn't change much.

[5]ed. – E.Z.L.N. is the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. (Zapatismo was originally an early-twentieth century peasants movement inspired by Emiliano Zapata Salazar, the main leader in the state of Chiapas during the Mexican Revolution.)Here are some thoughts by Carlos López (see 'Towards the Unknown') on the matter. "An example of these inconsistencies is the EZLN where a clear contradiction is shown in that many anarchists, or anarcho-zapatistas, of alleged anti-authoritarian posture, support and identify with this army, of communist tendency and authoritarian structure. These anarco-zapatistas are influenced by slogans such as "command by obeying", and we say that command always generates power and therefore there will always be someone to obey, despite the Zapatistas saying that "it is the people who command and the government that obeys". It is goes without saying that I do not refuse to acknowledge the worthy struggle undertaken in 1994 by the EZLN against the State, earning hundreds of supporters all over the world for their cause; and it happened that many anarchists were captivated by the "Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle", but the disappointment of realising that an authoritarian practice continued to exist, despite the alleged libertarian discourse, soon arrived."

It's a difficult topic. What you say is true, and at the same time the problem of the relevance to participate in movements and those of methods of intervention is always posed to anarchists. What is quite embarrassing, in my mind, is rather that which currently occurs a bit everywhere in the world: a barely critical active participation, the lack of highlighting of our practices and clear aims. It seems to me that Mexican anarchists have a fair bit of room to move: organisations that have long ambiguous history, are authoritarian and alienating don't exist here. Authoritarianism comes rather from the substantial number of Marxist organisations. In certain cases, this can come also from anarchist groups or collectives more or less juvenile, lacking the experience and with vague principles. It seems to me that the main problem remains the lack of assertion mentioned above. Many anarchists, for example, participated in recent school teacher's movement, without this participation being translated by an important theoretical or practical contribution: or a distancing regarding the strategies and reformist functions of the CNTE[6].

There exists an enormous difference between the aim of the "democratisation" of structure, very strong the Mexican social movement (tied to their verticality and control from above), and anarchist aims. This can create confusion, and anarchists have the largest interest in distinguishing themselves from it. In a general way, the small "self-managed" projects, cooperatives, and "socialising" activities occupy a very important place in the movement. Of course, it poses the same questions and has the same limits as in France, even if one can't bring them all together under the same banner, or reject them all entirely. But it is certain that many conditions seem gathered in order for anarchist to be able to develop in an important way in Mexico. What remains to be seen is how.

[6]Coordination built by "democratic" unions of the SNTE (Unique Union of Education Workers), a corrupt and bureaucratic organisation. There develops all the tendencies of Leftism of Mexico.

The virtual absence of critical texts on Zapatism o [*ed. – culture of acclaim around the Zapatistas*[5]], for a movement of such a large scale, that many know from experience (the communities welcome many people), that in general publishes texts of weak theoretical and analytical content, says a lot about it. Or the European analyses of different indigenous struggles, often strongly tinged with essentialism, and which display schematic readings of the indigenous world. This is filled by many more contradictions and issues that don't give a hint of these texts. We only rarely mention the infiltration of ideologies in the communities (socialism, Marxism, etc), the relationships with "modernity" and the outside, their long tradition of organisation (and the phenomenon of bureaucratisation of their structures), the forms that take the universal tension between people and community (the important departure of youth towards the US, including in Zapatista communities, for instance, the aspirations, the forms, the "deviances", etc.)

I think that the demands focused on culture, costumes, traditions, very present in Zapatism o and in the struggles of the communities, often obscures ambiguous notions for those who are attached to individual freedom: religion, practices tainted by authoritarianism (concerning age, status, for example), detainment of people in frameworks and defined practices. In Juchitán, in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, where a very strong struggle is taking place against the wind turbines, several demands of the Popular Assembly of the Juchitán People are very conservative: strengthening (Catholic) religious practices, wearing traditional Zapotec clothing. And their seeing in the Muxes (trans people) the testimony of an astounding freedom of morals, that reveals a very limited analysis of Zapotec society to us. I don't believe that the objective is to leave out indigenous struggles or to denounce, with a very intellectual venom, the peculiarities of communities.

Its necessary to know them, to understand them. The processes that unfold are interesting, like many practices, activities, understandings. Many comrades who struggle there demonstrate an impressive courage and persistence. But more of a critical perspective (that we invoke everywhere else) is essential. At least we don't want to continue to visit communities where it happens that we, anarchists, are quietly served by women, where we kindly assist elder's councils (which in the demagogic language transforms into "assemblies") or in traditional marriages, and keep quiet about our differences and reject them as secondary seems to us fitting, appropriate and coherent. All this implies a confrontation of ideas, the preparation, the rejection of the idealisation of other societies (of which many of us have a penchant for). It's much more difficult that the outrageous simplifications which we are used to on minority societies. And the "anarchist anthropologists", the university thinkers and the new libertarian "currents", obsessed by the questions of race and difference, aren't ultimately are big help to us in these questions.

5. It's very interesting… This "demagoguery" that you speak of, we find it over here especially in the struggles on the side of migrants or homeless people, or any other "category" of which the struggle is generally related to the immediate needs rather than to more general aspirations. But even if we could believe that the inspiration of these struggles today is uniquely the Left, we would be mistaken, since the autonomous movement of the '70s and after generally centered its struggles on the issues of needs too (through rent or electricity strikes, auto-reductions [ed. – public collective shoplifting] inspired by humanitarianism, etc.), a tradition which we, anarchists, are a few of those trying to take apart today. But it's a tradition that doesn't exist in Mexico, for instance. One wonders a bit, as a result, what are the most prominent tendencies in the radical milieus in Mexico? Do the anarchists have lots of theoretical space to move and create, or is the terrain already, as it is here in France, undermined by tendencies barely critical of authoritarianism?