Striving for Anarchism

Rafael Barrett

1910

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Editor's Note: *Rafael Barrett (1876–1910) was born in Spain and studied in Paris before emigrating to Latin America in 1904. He eventually settled in Paraguay, where he fought in the revolt against the Colorado Party. He briefly served as a secretmy for the railway but resigned rather than exploit the workers. He became a popular journalist who supported the anarchist cause. Jailed and then deportedfrom Paraguay, he spent his lastfew years in Uruguay before succumbing to ill health. The first piece to follow is from his article, "My Anarchism," originally published in the March 1909 edition of the Paraguayan anarchist paper,* ***Rebelión****. The second piece is an excerpt from his book, Moralidades actuales (Montevideo: Bertani, 1910), entitled "Striving." A good selection of his writings is included in* ***El Anarquismo en America Latina****, (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1990). The translations are by Paul Sharkey.*

My Anarchism

THE IGNORANT CONSIDER THAT ANARCHY is disorder, and that in the absence of government society will always revert to chaos. They cannot conceive of order other than as something imposed from without by force of arms.

Anarchism, as I understand it, boils down to political free enquiry.

We need to rid ourselves of respect for the law. The law is not accountable. It is an obstacle to all real progress. It is a notion that we have to abolish. The laws and constitutions that govern peoples by force are a sham. They are not the products of men's research and common advancement. They are the creatures of a barbarous minority that resorts to brute force in order to indulge its ava rice and cruelty…

Nine tenths of the world's population, thanks to written laws, know the degradation of poverty. It does not require much knowledge of sociology, when one thinks of the wonderful talent for assimilation and creativity displayed by the children of the "lower" orders, to appreciate the monstrous lunacy of that extravagant waste of human energy. The law rides roughshod over the mother's womb!

We fit the law the way a Chinese woman's foot fits its binding, or the way the baobab tree fits the Japanese vase. Voluntarily stunted!

Are we afraid ofthe "chaos" that might follow should we remove the restraints, if we should shatter the vase and plant ourselves on solid ground and face into the vastness? What does it matter what forms the future will take? Reality will unveil them. We are sure that they are going to be fine and noble like the tree sprouting freely.

Let our ideal be as lofty as may be. Let us not be "practical." Let's not try to "improve" the law and substitute one set of restraints for another. The more unattainable the ideal appears, the better. The sailor plots his course by the stars. So let our focus be on the longer term. In that way we can identifY the shorter term. And speed our success.

Striving

Life is a weapon. Where should it strike, against which obstacle should our muscle-power be deployed, how shall we crown our desires? Is it the better choice to burn ourselves out all in one go and die the ardent death of a bullet shattering against the wall, or grow old on the never-ending road and outlive hope? The powers that fate has momentarily let fall into our hands are

stormy forces indeed. For him who has a weather eye open and his ear cocked, who has risen once above the flesh, reality is anguish. Groans of agony and cries of victory call out to us in the night. Our passions, like a pack of straining hounds, scent danger and glory. We sense that we are masters of the impossible and our greedy spirit is torn asunder.

To step on to the virgin beach, to rouse the slumbering wonder, to feel the breath of the unknown, the quivering of a new form: these I crave. Better to distort than to repeat. Better to destroy than to imitate. Let the monsters come, just as long as they be young. Evil is what we are leaving behind in our wake. Beauty is the mystery being given birth. And this sublime fact, the advent ofthat which never was be fore, must strike to the very depths of our being. Gods for a minute, what matter to us are the sufferings of the fray, what matter the dark outcome as long as we can throw back at Nature: You did not create me in vain!

Man needs to take a look at himself and say: I am an instrument. Let us banish from our souls the familiar feeling of silent labour and give our admiration to the beauty ofthe world. We are but a means, but the end is great. We are the stray sparks from a prodigious conflagration. The majesty of the Universe shines above us and makes our humble exertions sacred. Little though we may be, we shall be all, provided we give ourselves completely. We have stepped out of the shadows in order to warm ourselves at the fire; we were born to spread our substance around and ennoble things. Our mission is to broadcast our body parts and our intellect; to open up our insides until our genius and our blood spill on to the earth. We exist only insofar as we give; for us to deny ourselves is to fade away in ignominy. We are a promise; the vehicle of unfathomable intentions. We live for our fruits; the only crime is sterility.

Our exertions link up with the countless pxertions of space and time and blend with the efforts of the universe. Our cry echoes through the infinite vastness. When we move, we make the stars tremble. Not an atom, not a single idea is lost in eternity. We are the siblings ofthe stones in our huts, of the sensitive trees and the speeding insects. We are siblings even of the imbeciles and criminals, failed experiments, the bankrupted children of our common mother. We are the siblings even of the fatalism that kills us. By fighting and winning we do our bit for the grand endeavour, and we do our bit when we are defeated too. Pain and annihilation have their uses too. From behind the endless, savage warfare comes the song of a vast harmony. Slowly our nerves strain, binding us to the unknown. Slowly our reason spreads its laws into unknown territory. Slowly science marshals phenomena into a higher unity, the inkling of which is essentially religious, because it is not religion that science destroys but religions. Queer notions cross our minds. A muddled and grandiose dream settles over humanity. The horizon is dense with shadows and in our hearts dawn smiles.

We do not yet understand. We are merely afforded the right to love. Driven on by supreme determinations welling up within us, we tumble into the bottomless enigma. We heed the wordless voice rising in our consciousness and tentatively we toil and fight. Our heroism consists of our ignorance. We are on the move, we know not where and we will not be stopped. The tragic encouragement of the irreparable caresses our sweating breasts.

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From Robert Graham (Ed.), *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas; Volume One: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300 CE to 1939).*

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