

Antagonistic violence

Approaches to the armed struggle in urban environments from an anarchist perspective.

Gustavo Rodriguez

November 2011

Introductory text for a debate with comrade Gustavo Rodriguez, at the Center of Anarchist Information (CEDIA), Mexico City, 8th of October 2011

Violence is only justifiable when it is necessary to defend oneself and others against violence [...] The slave is always in a state of legitimate self-defense and so his violence against the boss, against the oppressor, is always morally justifiable and should only be adjusted by the criterion of utility and economy of human effort and human suffering”

Enrico Malatesta, “Umanità Nova”, 25th of August 1921

Before starting – for a matter of principles -, we consider it to be necessary to take a position; some sort of “statement”, where is affirmed our compromise with the antagonist struggles, with the anti-systemical war. So it is worth it to reaffirm, that in the issue of “armed struggle” – concerning the title of this talking -, we are not, neither we can be, neutral because neither the “official History” neither the means of massive alienation are neutral. The so proclaimed “historical objectivity” and “journalistic objectivity” don’t exist. Are a myth of the domination. The “official History” is, invariably, the manipulation of the fact for the benefit of the winners, the manipulation of reality for the benefit of Power, not mattering who has the power.

In the particular case of the anarchist struggle, the distortion done by the massive means of alienation and the historians is a constant. It really doesn’t matter if we speak about conservative and right wing historians or leftist and “progressive” ones, the result is the same: the premeditated distortion, the manipulation of the facts and the reductionism. In one word: lies. That’s what is produced in a “neutral” and “objective” way about anarchism. That’s why we shouldn’t be surprised by the anarchist action of nowadays to be approached with the same optic as it has been in the past. It is the premeditated work with clear propagandistic aims, that aspires to present anarchism as an “ideology”, in the sense of Gobel, which is to say, as false conscience, as a distortion of reality and corruption of the truth. Reducing the anarchist theory and practice to the futurist architecture and dreamed utopia, whether it is through “irrational violence” or by the hand of the banal “non-violence”, which is to say, through that unreal dichotomy (pre-fabricated by the Power) that presents the anarchist ideas and practice as “innocuous nihilism”

and/or “sterile pacifism”; when in reality, none of the two tags correspond to the anarchist ethics. Which doesn't mean that don't exist supporters of anarchism located in both of these categories and even “supposed” anarchists that identify themselves with those postures that are totally far away from anarchism. The same ones that we have pointed out in lots of occasions as deviances, product of the constant intoxication of liberalism and Marxism. For such reason, here we will avoid the ambiguities and will takes sides for what we understand as just and necessary: the antagonistic violence. That doesn't mean that we aren't critical with our mistakes – historical and present ones -. Precisely, we understand critique as an indispensable weapon, as an inescapable part of the struggle. Therefore our emphasis in the urgent balance that may produce an historical “cut” and contextualizes the anarchic theory and practice. A pending subject since the defeat of anarcho-sindicalism in the Spanish state in 1939.

To us, the critique that doesn't land in a concrete proposal is not an antagonistic critique. With this statement, we don't frame ourselves in the positivist logic and, even less, align with the rhetoric of the “revolutionary activist” with its typical “Something must be done!”, so kindred with that “What to do?” that in practice is traduced in the very common “do what I say not what I do”. On the very contrary, we position ourselves in the context of the critique contributing with modest contributions to the libertarian armed critique. Therefore, when we affirm that the critique that doesn't land in a concrete proposal is not an antagonistic critique, we look forward to conjugate theory and practice. We install ourselves in the praxis – using some Marxist slang now that we spoke about intoxications. Without any doubts, the critique keeps being irreplaceable at the moment of opening cracks in the anti-systemic pathway. But we not only refer to the critical evaluation of the past. The critique of our combative daily-life, to the day by day of unrest, is also indispensable. What grants a specific weight to the armed critique are the concrete teachings that it gives to us. To learn from the armed critique is the way to not repeat mistakes, it is the vehicle that feeds the antagonistic project, it is the path that will allow us the development of the refractory conscience through the transformation of apathy into antagonistic rage. Only like that, will we make concrete the self-management of the struggles and the generalized insurrection.

Now that we made our positions clear, lets start, then, with our consequent defense of the armed struggle, of the antagonistic violence, of direct action, as an effective means of struggle. As we have pointed out before, the sterile “non-violence” – that innocuous militancy of the idyllic pacifism -, not only is it alien to anarchism but also it doesn't match with our general values. This posture comes at first from the Christian intoxication and from a certain “radical” liberalism that serves the citizenship ideology, that amorphous mass subjected to the State that reclaims a more elevated level of interlocution with papa State. We are referring to what the ideologues of liberalism denominate “civil society”. At first, this intoxication reached – mainly in the 70's and 80's – proportions of “tendency” in the interior of our “shops”, misunderstanding completely different concepts and identifying “pacifism” with “antiwar” and “anti-militarism”. The anarchists, by principle, are “anti-militarists” and, by consequence, we are “antiwar”. Which means, we openly and with all our strength oppose to the military institution, identifying it with all the different repressive corporations, as repressive agents of the system of domination. And, logically, we are “antiwar” because we oppose to the war. Not to the anti-systemic war but to the wars of the capital, to the wars between States, whether these are between potencies or between developed States of the center against peripheral States, or the ones between peripheral States, for border reasons, for the control of “natural resources” or just by pure chauvinism.

So, speaking again about armed struggle, we were saying that we defend the “armed struggle”. We support its effectiveness as a necessary vehicle to combat domination and we do it starting from our ethical foundations, as to say, from the ethics of liberty and the radical critic of power. Which doesn’t mean – remarking what was previously said – as the powerful of all colours use to tag us, an apology to the “irrational” violence, an expression that usually is used to qualify the “unexplainable” violent deeds using the false dichotomy “insecurity-security”, “violence-non-violence”, so in-fashion in these days of ultra imposition of the citizenship’s ideology.

At this point – with the intention of avoiding distortions -, it would be needed to underline the anarchists fight for the elimination of violence. Is to say, we fight against the present brutal force in the social relations. We fight against the systemic violence, or what is the same, we fight for the eradication of the capitalist violence and State terrorism. Logically, the only way to fight the systemic violence is to use antagonistic violence.

With this, we try to make clear that our critique is not to the guns *per se*, our critique is to the cult of arms that is done by certain armed groups. For such reason, our discussion is not centered in the use of guns but what is wanted to be achieved through their use. The arms are not the problem but who carries them and for what purpose is using them. In other words, it establishes the difference between the organization of vanguard party structure (by consequence authoritarian) and the informal, horizontal and autonomous configuration, therefore anti-authoritarian. Of course, the subject is not limited to an issue of forms. In this discussion arises an underlying problem. It’s a question of values, it’s an ethical dilemma: it is the question between means and goals. The contradiction that, logically, is erased by the authoritarian groups by justifying the “necessity” of any mean to achieve the goal. Even if, in general, that is the conquest of the State’s power or the imposition of an Order, whether it is an ideological or religious one (sorry for the redundancy).

For us, the issue is much more complex because it has to do with the anti-authoritarian struggle. We don’t fight to conquer the State nor to impose an ideological and/or religious order. We fight for total liberation, we fight against everything that dominates us. Our struggle is radical, which is to say, we go to the roots of the problems: domination, power. That’s why we really make a stand saying that the goal isn’t any other than the destruction of the system of domination. We pose the total destruction of all the complex net of contemporary domination. We don’t fight for “other possible capitalism”, as is shouted by the new millennium leftism, picking up the old Leninist thesis of the end of “war communism” and the implementation of NEP, with whom the State capitalism started in the former USSR. Neither we fight for the imposition of the “proletarian” State or the “proletarian dictatorship”, euphemisms to refer to the dictatorship of the unique party, generally headed by some sort of omnipresent messiah that exercises his mandate of “great leader” in an absolutist form. True authoritarian regimes that in practice have shown to be a giant retrogress for the emancipatory struggles.

Without doubts, all this ethical questioning, has always prevented “tactical” alliances and has limited our coordination with other political groups, with whom we saw ourselves being forced to “make company” in very brief trips, having them as “travel mates”. But – I insist – were very short “trips” and, in general, in different “vehicles”. Naturally, this brought up with it the regular condemnation by these political groups that accuse us of “sectarianism” due to being unable to understand this unchangeable posture of anarchism. And it’s normal that they fall in this kind of “reasoning” from their opportunistic positions. It cannot be another way when, firstly, different goals are being seek, and secondly when having ethical values that are completely opposed to

each other. Let's not forget, in the case of the urban guerrillas that proliferated in the decades of the 70's and 80's in western Europe, how lots of them, for example, in Germany, the Red Army Faction (RAF) and the Revolutionäre Zellen (Revolutionary Cells), operated with the support of Stassi (DDR secret services) and the Russian KGB and even happened to work as mercenaries under the orders of Saddam Husseins and Al-Fatah. Putting in evidence what we were focusing about the ethical differences and the incompatibility in the issue of means and goals. Undoubtedly for Leninist organizations there was no contradiction in collaborating and coordinate themselves with the minions of the German and Russian secret polices. From their perspective, focused to the take over of the State's power, all these repressive agencies were "tactical" allies. With that bipolar vision of the East-West "confrontation" and the ideological confront between the "yan-kee's imperialism" and the "Russian model", everything was reduced to the simplistic scheme of "good ones" and "evil ones", where the "good ones" were the Russian imperialism and its satellite States with their repressive corps at the service of "Communism". That logic still persists and we corroborate it with the usual exceptions that are given to the denominated "progressive governments", making the false distinction between "good" and "bad States and, therefore, silencing the abuses done by these "progressive governments" and justifying them with anti-imperialistic rhetoric, with the Machiavellic conceptions of "the enemy of the enemy is my friend" and with the social-democratic bet for the "lesser evil".

Getting back to our subject. As Txema Bofill, an ex-member of the Groupes d'Action Révolutionnaire Internationalistes (*Internationalist Groups of Revolutionary Action – GARI*), points very well, the great merit of the armed action groups lies in not to swallow the domination system's old fairytale that affirms that "Nothing can be done against the State, and even less if done from the part of a rebel minority". In fact, the antagonistic action groups don't believe in the invulnerability of the domination system. The enemy which we fight against is in front of us, in front of our noses. In this very same instant plans the conditions of domination of today, of tomorrow and of after tomorrow, that will allow it to continue to hold the power or, that in this precise moment, is sketching new repressive models that will permit to improve the domination when it takes the power, when it gets the power of the State. Undoubtedly, that is the biggest difference that we the anarchists have with the other political groups that lots of times choose the armed struggle. Our struggle is not the struggle for the State's power but the one for the total destruction of the State, is not for the implementation of "another possible capitalism" but for the total destruction of the Capital. Therefore, we identify in the struggle against the institutional power another instituting power that generates within it the same evils that we fight against and, in consequence, we'll have to keep fighting against once this power gets instituted, despite the fact of how much "revolutionaries" they proclaim to be and the verbiage – with libertarian pretensions – of their speech.

And well, after this intent to unlock this theoretical-practical nodes where the ethical differences about armed struggle are rooted, it would be worth it to start to get inside the "armed struggle in urban environments" subject. As a start, it would be needed to highlight that the origins of the so-called "urban guerilla" – despite the ones that took advantage of it through the years – is hundred per cent anarchist, as a concept, as organizational model and as strategy of struggle. It should be pointed out that the first manual where the subject of armed struggle was theorized, was elaborated in 1965, by the anarchist Abraham Guillén, during his exile in Uruguay, with the title "Estratègia de guerrilla urbana" (*Urban guerilla strategy*) – four years before Carlos

Marighella had written the “Small manual of the urban guerilla”, inspired by the works of Guillén. In that same year, he would publish “Theory of violence”.

Also what would be needed to be remembered is that the most remote sparks of “urban guerilla” date back to that redundancy that’s usually called “illegal anarchism” and that we already have spoke about in other occasions. With this derogatory term, the differences between the anarchist practice and a pretended legal “anarchism” (concretely immobilizer and ideologically platonian, that would bet – and still does – in the human evolution) would be fixed. The ones who built the bases for the development of the denominated “urban guerilla”, with their tireless and consequent action against domination, were the 19th century’s “illegal” anarchists. Among these comrades’ basic principles are noticed the “direct action” and the “autonomy”, which is to say, the action without intermediaries nor hierarchies and the absolute freedom and independence of the groups and individuals. From this perspective, were developed methods of action according with such ethical values, attending in a punctual manner to the correspondence of means and goals. Among these methods we identify the “propaganda by the deed”, the “retaliations” (or attacks against representatives or ombudsmen of domination) and the “expropriation”. The majority of times, these actions would interrelate with each other and were and are – because we also exist in the 21st century – complementary to each other. Besides, these actions were almost always done (and are done) by the same affinity groups, although not all the groups necessarily incur in all the practices. Sometimes there are groups more dedicated to expropriation or to the propaganda by the deed or to attacks. However – going a bit deeper in the interaction between these methods of struggle – there are groups and/or individuals that, although are dedicated solely to the expropriation activities, they are in solidarity with the armed action groups through the donation of their expropriations’ product, destined to the acquisition of prime material needed for the fabrication of explosives or to buy ammunitions, etc.

Besides, we would have to insist, that this way of acting didn’t get circumscribed to the 19th century but that it kept on as *modus operandi* through out the 20th century and still keeps on as an anarchist practice in the 21st century. The profusion of anarchist armed groups had its zenith in the dawn of the 20th century in Europe, United states and all over Latin America, especially in Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Uruguay and Mexico, through the use of “retaliations”, propaganda by the deed and expropriations, in the urban environments. At the end of the 19th century the big urban zones had been converted in the natural center of the capitalist development, concentrating the industries, the banks, as well as the different power institutions. In their streets would grow the contradictions between the opulent bourgeoisie and the exploited and oppressed workers, a situation that would offer a group of conditions that would facilitate social confrontation. This allowed the development of antagonistic structures formed by small cells of action based on affinity among comrades. On the other hand, these small cells, of between five and ten comrades, would coordinate in an informal way with other affinity groups at the hour of doing joint actions, reaching a certain irregular strength without sacrificing their autonomy. Such ways of acting would give them mobility and would allow them to insure a maximum of effectiveness and a minimum of risk which turns impossible an “efficient” repression from the part of domination, as was pointed out recently by the Mexican insurrectionist and eco-anarchist groups, in a collective communiqué. This way of acting and organizing would serve as paradigm to the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation – FAI), a group that pushed forward the conditions that concluded in the attempts of Social Revolution during the installation of the 2nd Republic in the Spanish State.

The defeat of anarcho-syndicalism in 1939, would give space to put in practice the urban guerilla strategy against the nationalist military dictatorship. The anarchists in the Spanish State would combat Francoism, organizing the first urban guerillas in Madrid, Barcelona, Málaga, Granada, Valencia and Zaragoza. For almost two decades, from 1939 to 1957, the cells of the anarchist urban guerilla would put in check the Francoist dictatorship. In Catalonia the cells coordinated by Quico Sabaté and José Luís Facerías would stand out. In Málaga, Córdoba and even Madrid, the battle was being done by the anarchist group of António Raya, whom had found refuge in the mountains but would operate in the cities using the most unpredictable costumes reaching the point of masking themselves as military and priests several times. In Granada the group of the Quero brothers would be noticed by the spectacularity of their actions. The end of the harassment to the Francoist dictatorship and the pronounced diminishing of the anarchist revolutionary action, not only would be the logic consequence of the Francoist repression but also would be the product of the obscene negotiations between the “anarcho”-syndicalists of Madrid’s CNT with the Vertical Syndicates, that, mixed with immobility of CNT in the exile – that, paradoxically was controlled by FAI -, would provoke a strong internal split unleashing a fractional struggle that would lead to the profound decadence of the Spanish Libertarian Movement.

At the beginnings of the 60’s decade, a new generation of anarchists residing in the Spanish State and in exile, would substitute the one fallen, continuing the strategy of urban guerilla, developing the clandestine struggle and putting a full stop to the immobility of CNT and FAI in the exile and to the coward surrender of CNT Madrid. In July 1965 the FIJJL (Federacion Iberica de Juventudes Libertarias – Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth), would release one communiqué where it was stated: “We consider that the supreme objectives of the “tolerated opposition”, followed by the “classical opposition”, limited to the simple petition of “SYNDICAL FREEDOM” and “RIGHT TO STRIKE”, should be overwhelmed by a more general, more concrete, more urgent and more positive demand: FREEDOM TO ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS”. The libertarian youngsters, consistent with their principles, pronounced themselves for the “action groups’ autonomy” and stated as definitive “the rupture of contacts with the immobilistic sector represented by the CNT’s Intercontinental Office”, convinced that immobility was an “inseparable phenomenon of the legal existence of the libertarian organizations”.

April 30th 1966, the Italian media informs of the “mysterious disappearance of Monseigneur Marcos Ussía, church counsellor of the Spanish embassy in Vatican”. May the 1st, Luís A. Edo, would vindicate the kidnap of the diplomat-priest done by an anarchist group that demanded in exchange the release of the political prisoners kept in the Francoist prisons. May 3rd, would be published in the newspaper *Avanti*, a communiqué signed by the Grupo Primero de Mayo (Sacco y Vanzetti) (Group 1st of May (Sacco and Vanzetti)), where could be read: “We are a group of Spanish anarchists that have seen ourselves forced to use this form of action in order to make the Spanish ambassador in the “*Santa Sede*” to send a petition to the Pope, in order to this last one publicly demand to General Franco’s government, the freedom to all Spanish democrats (workers, intellectuals and young students) condemned to different sentences in the Francoist prisons [...]”. With Grupo Primero de Mayo’s action, the anarchists would restart the antagonistic action in the Spanish state, under the flag of direct solidarity with the imprisoned comrades. According to Telesforo Tajuelo, beyond the theoretical differences, this insistence in solidarity would be, years later, the identification and connection point between the Grupo Primero de Mayo and GARI.

Since its beginning, the Grupo Primero de Mayo defended the coordination among the anti-authoritarian action groups across the world, putting the emphasis on the autonomy of the an-

tagonistic groups. In such a way that, in the 20th of August 1967, the Movimiento de Solidaridad Revolucionaria Internacional (International Revolutionary Solidarity Movement – MSRI) it would make its public presentation, having the Grupo Primero de Mayo as one of the most active components. That day, the American embassy would be strafed in London, an action claimed by MSRI. In November 12th 1967, eight embassies and two governmental offices were completely destroyed by very strong dynamite devices, in an action coordinated in different European cities. The 10 attacks with bombs were claimed by MSRI. In Bonn, Germany, were attacked the embassies of Greece, Spain and Bolivia; in Rome, Italy, the Venezuelan embassy; in The Hague, Holland, the embassies of USA, Greece and Spain; in Madrid, Spain, the North American embassy; in Milan, Italy and Geneva, Switzerland, the tourist offices of the Spanish government.

At the end of 1967, the Movimiento 22 de Marzo (22nd March Movement), releases in Paris several thoughts that will establish the theoretical bases that differentiate the anti-authoritarian action from the “focoism” that was imposed as a trend among the leftist groups, making clear that: “It’s imperative to abandon the theory of “leading vanguard” and to adopt the -much more honest- concept of active minority, that plays a function of permanent ferment, promoting the action without wanting to direct it. The strength of our movement comes, precisely, from the fact that it is sustained in an “uncontrollable” spontaneity, that impulses, without pretending to channel, without wanting to use it for its own benefit, the action that it started”. These premises would be considered by the MSRI and the posterior configurations: the Movimiento Iberico de Liberacion (Iberian Liberation Movement – MIL), GARI and, in the 80’s decade, the Comandos Autónomos Anticapitalistas (Anti-capitalist Autonomous Commandos – CCAA).

In the first days of April 1968, in vespers of the demolishing “French may”, the Grupo Primero de Mayo, sent a document to all the anarchist groups titled “For an international anarchist practice” where was pointed the existence of a “*status quo*” imposed by the States that pretended to be “irreconcilable” (USA, China, USSR) that counted with a wide spectrum of subjected countries conforming satellite circuits. So, given this fact, the anarchists should not only reaffirm their strong anti-statism but, more than that, to assume a rebellious attitude, of permanent conflict, taking as standard the critique to authoritarianism.

With these proposals, would flourish uncountable anti-authoritarian action groups in urban contexts, not only in Europe but also in the United States and Latin America. Highlighting in Germany, the Zentralrat der umherschweifenden Haschrebellen (*Central council nomadic hash rebels*), a group that year and a half after the assassination of a student at the hands of police, during the protests for the visit of the Shah in 1967, will radicalize, forming together with other anti-authoritarian groups, the Bewegung 2. Juni (2nd of June Movement -2JM), the most determined “anarchist guerilla” in Federal Germany. In Great Britain, around the same time, would appear on stage the popular Angry Brigade. This anarchist armed group would maintain the harassment against the system of domination for almost one decade, doing antagonistic actions since 1969 until 1984. It would be worldwide famously known in 1972, with the trial of 8 of its members in High Court. These fightful anarchists not only received heavy sentences from the enemy’s side but also the condemnation of the so-called wide left. The repudiation towards this anarchist structure was not only limited to the circles of the typical tolerated opposition, but also from the part of the so-called “organized anarchism”, which is to say, from the member clubs and acronyms, who were condemning them as “terrorists”, “adventurers” and “individualists”.

This populist vision that condemns *a priori* the action of the conscientious minorities, betting for the “revolutionary” evolution of the big herds, instead of understanding the function

of the “permanent ferment” that the acting minority performs in the development of the anti-authoritarian conscience, still persists in certain anarchist sectors. The problems the Angry Brigade faced, were the same that were experienced by the active antagonistic groups in their times; without mattering so much their theoretical positions. All the groups that would deny the limits that the State imposes and would opt to overcome legality, radicalizing the struggles, were -and are- condemned by the extra-parliamentary social organizations, boxed in legalism. From the “workers movement” -still alive those years – to the legal anarchism, passing from the communist parties. Naturally, this phenomenon would repeat itself everywhere without establishing major differences between Leninists and anarchists. The ones that would opt for the armed struggle, the ones that were giving life to the antagonistic violence, would receive the unanimous condemnation from the social organizations and from the organized left in general.

In the United States, the history would be repeated, with groups such as the Weather Underground and the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA). Also these armed groups were isolated by the “revolutionary” social organizations and condemned as “provocative” and “individualistic terrorists” that motivated the repression and, therefore, were a threat for the growth of the “mass movement” and of the “militant organization”. The testimonies of Martin Sostre of SLA about this subject, in which he affirms that the condemnation of SLA from the side of the left media was identical to the one done by the dominant class, are recollected in the compilation done by comrade Jean Weir about the Angry Brigade. According to Sostre: “The left movement’s press wants to make us believe that in order to overthrow the dominant class, we simply have to organize mass movements, protest demonstrations and to repeat revolutionary slogans”.

The condemnation from the social organizations, from the syndicates and from the “communist” parties, was based on what they denominated of “Anarchist syndrome”. In effect, by following to the letter the suggestions of Guillén’s Manual, as it was done even by the “anti-imperialist” urban guerillas, they inscribed their action in the anarchist logic, is to say, they were focused in the constant harassment to the domination system attacking its most known representatives and their faithful keepers. They recurred to expropriation, to documents forgery, to retaliation, to the propaganda by the deed, to police executions, etc. That’s how groups like RAF, Red Brigades, the SLA, even -here in Mexico- the Liga Comunista 23 Septiembre (Communist League 23rd September) would be cataloged, by the “specialists” on the issue, as “anarchist” groups.

From this side of the puddle, around these same years, I would highlight in Uruguay the Organización Popular Revolucionaria 33 Orientales (Popular Organization 33 Orientals – OPR 33), the armed hand of the Federación Anarquista Uruguaya (Uruguayan Anarchist Federation – FAU) that made its presence public in 1966 as counter-measure to the focoism of the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional – Tupamarus (National Liberation Movement Tupamarus – MLN-T). However, the Leninist contamination and the nationalist inclinations, not only would provoke the debacle of FAU but as time passed would lead to the formation of a vanguard party structure: the Partido de la Victoria del Pueblo (People’s Victory Party – PVP), as logical consequence of its Bolshevik deviation, to finish in our days as electoral party. Something similar would happen with the anarchist urban guerilla in Germany. The legendary 2nd of June Movement, would finish its days in 1980 with lots of its members joining RAF. If on the one hand their presence imposed a lightly libertarian stamp that would lead RAF to a prolonged process of re-thinking that would finish in its self-dissolution, on the other, the fusion with this Leninist group closed the possibilities of reproduction of anarchist armed groups in Germany.

Although being undeniable, as we have pointed out before, the anarchist etymology of the “urban guerilla”, nowadays, among the anarchist groups of antagonistic action is being put forward a deep discussion about the very concept of “guerilla” and the methodology that is inherit to it. In the last years of the 70’s and beginnings of the 80’s of the last century, there was noticed a decrease of the “classical” urban guerilla, which gave origin to a “new type” of urban guerilla that even questions the belonging to this strategy of irregular war. The year of 1976 and mainly, the Italian spring of 77 and the denominated “days of reflection” of January 1978, marked the deepening of the critique about the guerilla issue. The irruption of “Azione Revoluzionaria” (Revolutionary Action – AR) and its feminist structure: “Azione Revoluzionaria – Autonomia Femminista” (Revolutionary Action-Feminist Autonomy – AR-AF), would re-contextualize the issue of the anarchist urban guerilla in Italy. Even though, these structures admit in their “First theoretical document”, dating from January 1978, that they were born with one eye on RAF’s experience and the development of the struggles in Federal Germany and, with the other eye, centered in the particularities of the Italian anti-authoritarian movement that didn’t find any identification with the several armed vanguards that were conducting the guerilla warfare during those days. Like wise, they were deepening the critique to the leadership role that was deployed by these groups of the same style as the Red Brigades and putting forward a different organizational proposal, based on informal coordination and affinity groups where “the traditional link is substituted by relations based in sympathy, characterized by a maximum of reciprocal intimacy, conscience and trust between its members”, recommending them to remain as small nuclei in order to be able to conserve the characteristics that make able the organization based in affinity and to avoid possible infiltrations, guaranteeing a maximum of effectiveness with a minimum of risks.

In the same text, they would re-affirm (as some sort of actualization of the struggle and as a reliable proof of critique’s deepening) that “the new movement not only rejects the historical Sovietic Marxist monsters and the hybrid of the Italian Marxism” but also “rejects the myth of proletarian as a revolutionary class, a myth that has conducted the movement to a dead-end alley since 1968 until nowadays”. The really transcendent thing is that this is asserted by the AR’s comrades in a document from the 70’s! Assuring that the fact of having “got rid” of such a myth “will unleash energies from which the 77’ movement is just a foreshadow”. On the same hand, “Azione Revoluzionaria” would affirm in this “First theoretical document”, that the new movement doesn’t relegate the combat to “the classes” but “assumes it in the first person” underlying that “the direct action gets back to the individuals conscious of themselves as individuals that can transform their destiny and taking back the control of their own lives”. In this way “recognizes the inadequacy of the old socialist project in its several versions” and highlights that “all institutions and values of the hierarchical society have sold-out their functions”, insisting in the fact that doesn’t exist “any social reason” to save them. “These institutions and values, together with the city, the school, etc., have reached their historical limits. It’s all the social universe that is in the tunnel of the crisis [...] But, precisely, in the way that now the crisis invests all the fields contaminated by domination, more the reactionary aspects of the socialist project are exposed, whether it is Maoist, Trotskyist, or Stalinist, that conserves the concepts of hierarchy, authority and State, as part of the post-revolutionary future and, as consequence, also conserves the values of property – “nationalized” – and class – “proletarian dictatorship”.

As if they would have written their document this morning, “Azione Revoluzionaria” correctly points: “The critical, constructive and utopian presence is a necessary condition but is not enough, such presence cannot be hegemonic nowadays, in parallel it is needed to develop a negative crit-

ical presence, destructive of the on-going processes. The destructive critique, the armed critique is, nowadays, the only force capable of turning any emancipatory project, credible and reliable [...] The social and political forces are increasingly automatized in the masses and are more and more dependent of the State, they don't have any other arm than the forced consensus, imposed by the terror to prevent by any means the increasing antagonism. The Father capital has called its faithful ones to recuperation. The defense to-the-death of the State, or in a better way, of its terrorist reinforcement, is what unites them.”

As if this categorical critique of the first days of 1978 could seem not enough, Azione Rivoluzionaria would distribute a call during the III Congress of IAF (International of Anarchist Federations), celebrated from 23 to 26 of March of that same year in the city of Carrara, where it would be proposed a theoretical-practical “renovation” and an update of the anarchist “intervention methods” that it is worth it to take a look at; mainly, to those comrades that always insist in the “concrete” proposals, perceiving the propositions as “lines to follow”, for they don't assume critique and reflection as indispensable tools to put the direct action in practice, renouncing to decide, having as starting point the reflective critique, what path to follow. In such a leaflet, AR would specify: “We make a call to all the anarchist comrades, gathered in this umpteenth congress, and that aren't still sclerotic and old before time, due to the constant and exhausting task of frequenting the scene, some in the role of actors, others as spectators, of the Congregational assembly representation, and to the comrades that haven't yet exhausted all their revolutionary spirit and energy in a practice that makes from waiting and defense its main prerogatives.” Comrades, I insist – just to not someone to think that this text was handled in the last Anarchist Congress in the Autonomous National University of Mexico – this leaflet was written in March 1978.

In that same text, they were exhorting the anarchists gathered in Carrara, to relocate the theoretical-practical scaffolding according to the needs of the moment: “Comrades, lets renovate ourselves once again, lets march side by side with the times or, even better, lets try to prevent the times. How can we pretend to be incisive if our methods of intervention, the already small theoretical propaganda, turned to be obsolete and exhausted reducing anarchism to a sterile and fruitless opinion movement, only capable of acting in the defensive terrain each time that power throws its repressive arrows [...] Comrades, lets abandon the politics of slogans, of the schemes, of the information generated, in fact, a hundred years ago [...]”

Undoubtedly, 33 years after that historical call of Azione Rivoluzionaria, the abandonment of our old diagrams of organization and action and, the theoretical-practical renovation of anarchism, keeps being one of our pendent signatures. This fact shows to us, without doubts, how, since always, the anarchists have sought forms to update the theoretical-practical scaffolding that sustains us and to configure new organizational structures, overcoming the precedents – tolerated or ignored by the domination due to consider them inoffensive – with the goal of reconfiguring ourselves according to the context that we have to live, in order to give the needed weapons to the frontal struggle against the system of domination.

Despite the adverse interests of the “anarchist” officialism, those approaches of the late 70's, would generate an intense polemic in the interior of our ambients, which would keep being shaped until starting to delineate the actual insurrectionist tendency. The debate around the destructive critique of the system of domination by means of antagonistic violence, by armed struggle, the propaganda by the deed, the expropriation and the direct attack against the power representatives, as strategy leading to the self-organization of the struggle and the spreading of insurrection, would generalize in wide sectors of the antagonistic anarchism, reaching an inter-

national dimension. "Appointments for an internal and external discussion", would be the document that would synthesize the concerns and reflections of the first moment of the debate and would be entirely published in *Anarchismo* and *Contrainformazione*. These deep reflections, will inevitably lead to the questioning, from an anarchist perspective, of the pertinence of "guerilla" as concept and method of struggle.

The term "guerilla", refers to the "small war" or "minor conflict" or "of low intensity". Therefore, it is implicit in the term, the reference to "light troops" dedicated to carry out brief attacks of harassment to the regular forces. It started to be used as tactic in Spain during the Napoleonic invasion. Forming small groups of civilians trained and commanded by experienced military men, to assure the constant attack against the occupying French troops. Since then, guerilla, as a tactic and as strategy, was used to fight any asymmetrical war. Since those times, the term was used to designate those small civilian groups militarily trained, converted in irregular "troops", dedicated to harass the army, through fast operations, having in favour the knowledge of the operational terrain, the mobility and the surprise factor. Contrary to the conventional wars, the "guerilla warfare" is flexible, less geometrical and much more mobile.

In the particular case of "urban guerilla", this tactic, as we have mentioned at the beginning, has its beginnings in the anarchist attack to the system of domination, with the clear goal of inflicting systematic damage to the Power institutions (State-capital and clergy) and to the representatives of domination, to the persons that exercise the power and their lackeys. Its strategy is centered in the attack at the heart of State and capital: the city. The action of the urban guerilla is destined to affect "the good functioning" of the system. The whole of its attacks will be planned against repressive institutions (policemen, judiciary men, military men, etc.), combining the "armed propaganda", the executions, the gathering of arms and ammunition, the expropriations, the sabotage of the productive apparatus, the destruction of commodities, the solidarity with the prisoners and the attack against the centers of massive alienation. This combination of attacks seek their extension and reproduction, deploying, at the surface, the combat against domination, being conceived to develop the "revolutionary conscience" among the alienated multitude. According to this strategy, the "common people" would abandon their usual passivity and would join the insurrection, once that they would realize the vulnerability of the system of domination. Nevertheless – and here's the contemporary anarchist critic -, the practice of the classic "urban guerilla", requires the use of "specialists", of specialized "technicians" and that brings the acceptance of the denominated "professional revolutionary", the cult of the arms and a series of particular "necessities" to be attended (the safe houses, the intelligence and counter-intelligence systems, the hierarchies, etc.) that at end finish to abandon completely the anarchist ideas.

In this sense, Alfredo Bonanno, reminds us in the "Armed Joy", that for the traditional guerilla organizations is inevitable to fall into the technocratic danger, because, more sooner than later, they finish imposing their "technicians". In this pamphlet, he points to us that the insurrectionist structure that finds the joy in the action directed to the destruction of domination "considers the means used to carry out such destruction as instruments, as means. The ones who use those instruments shouldn't be converted into their slaves. As well as the ones that don't know how to use them should not be transformed into slaves of those who know how to use them. The dictatorship of the means is the worst of the dictatorships [...] It is needed to develop a critique of the arms. We have seen too much worshipping of the gun-machine and of military efficiency. The armed struggle is not something that only concerns the arms. The arms cannot represent, by themselves, the revolutionary dimension. It is dangerous to reduce the complex reality to

only one dimension and to only one object. In fact, the game has this risk, of reducing the vital experiment to a toy, converting it into something magical and absolute. It is not by chance that the gun machine appears as a symbol of many combatant revolutionary organizations. We should go more forward in order to understand the deep meaning of struggle as pleasure, escaping from the illusions and traps of the representation of the commodified spectacle by mythical or mythified objects.” So, he suggests to us, to refuse all the roles, including the one of “professional revolutionary” with the objective of “breaking the magical siege of the commodity’s dramaturgy”, conscientious that the armed struggle has to avoid the division of tasks and the assignment of roles imposed by the ideology of production, refusing professionalism.

The “moral” that underlies this reflection, we repeat it again, doesn’t place the problems in the arms but in who uses them, how he uses them and for what; it centers it in the type of structure that is developed and in the role of the insurrectionist minorities. The obsolete about the classical “urban guerilla” is its “technical specialization”, is to say, the preponderant role that is given to the knowledge of the arms, their worship and the role of the “professional revolutionary”, together with all infra-structure that this supposes. This reflection makes clear that it’s not enough to spread the struggle everywhere but that it must be spread to each aspect of our daily life. That is where the self-organization of the struggle and the development of the antagonistic “factions”, of the active minorities, is rooted,. From the side of the anarchist reflection – based on the experience of the struggles -, we have understood the recuperative role of the old Leninist structures, and so we have reaffirmed our values of direct action to face the inflexible schemes of “professionalization” of the struggle, invalidated beforehand in the contemporary social war against the renovated domination.

We are conscientious that the antagonistic minorities run the risk of transforming themselves in the radical spectacle of the struggles if in the impulse of the permanent confrontation they are not able to articulate the spreading of the struggle through the development of the antagonistic conscience. The awareness of the anti-authoritarian conscience passes, unquestionably, by a process of secession. By a point of total rupture with the system of domination. The system has penetrated the DNA of the “citizen”. The State and the Capital are part of our body. That’s why they exist, because we reproduce them at each step. That is the reason why we so frequently find amongst us, the unconscious defense of domination, the defense of the State-capital. Each time we ask for more work instead of struggling for the destruction of work: we ask for more capitalism. In each occasion that we demand “security”, that we demand “bigger budget” for health, education, housing, etc.: we claim for more State. That path doesn’t lead to the total liberation, it is reduced to begging for some links to make the chain a little bit bigger.

The “ORGANIZATION”, like this with capital letters, that all are so much worried about and that in practice is reduced to acronyms, guilds and sects, will be fruit of the development of the antagonistic violence and of the extension of the struggles. The social war will impose the need for an organization, that is the true advance of the real movement. The permanent antagonism of the active minorities is the proposal of attack, here and now, to the structures of domination and the ones that impersonate them, to highlight, in first place, that the enemy is vulnerable and to show that the comrades kidnapped by the State, are not alone but instead that they count on all our solidarity. The specific weight of the antagonistic minorities, of the affinity groups in permanent conflict, is not shown by the number of attacks neither by the damages that each time stronger explosions give to the enemy. The gravitation of this acting minorities lies in the contagion, in the geometrical expansion of the struggle and the arise of anti-authoritarian conscience. So, behind

every explosion, every bullet, every expropriation done, behind the putting into practice of any manifestation of antagonistic violence, has always to be present our ideal, making sure that our struggle is for total liberation, for the definitive destruction of the system of domination, for Anarchy.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Gustavo Rodriguez
Antagonistic violence
Approaches to the armed struggle in urban environments from an anarchist perspective.
November 2011

Retrieved on January 25, 2013 from flying.squat.gr

theanarchistlibrary.org