

Ideology as authority vol. I

Orkanen, #3, vol. 1

Recently I listened to a discussion between some of my comrades concerning anarchist violence, but more specifically about what might be called, with a military term, “collateral damage”. I’m picking it up here, because I believe that some very problematic assumptions were raised, and I want to, at least for myself, clarify a few things. The discussion took its start in the case of the Marfin bank in Athens, where three bank workers died in a fire set during the general strike of 2010. The question discussed was whether deaths like these are an acceptable side-effect of the struggle against the existent. The part who believed that such is the case, argued that bank workers are responsible for their choices; by profession, they are actively upholding class society, and are therefore legitimate targets. The first problem here is that obviously no-one is innocent when it comes down to the question of who is responsible for keeping society running. Anyone can choose to rebel, but doesn’t do it, there is no way around it. Is the bank worker more responsible than the factory worker (this poor unknown figure being abused in every discussion)? On a general level, I don’t think so. Everyone carries their individual responsibility, but that’s another question.

The second problem is the idea of certain groups of people being targets, legitimate or not. Clearly in the Marfin bank case, those bank workers were not targets. Their deaths were simply the result of actions taken in carelessness. The only way to defend their deaths is by afterward characterizing them collateral damage. But in order to speak of human collateral damage, you need to put something above the individual, you need an authority. In this case, it is anarchist ideology that is the master under which you must submit, and such an ideological master might very well be the worst. The responsibility can be put nowhere, and the only certain thing is that someone else is always more pure and correct than you, giving them the right to judge and persecute.

Certainly, for anarchists, human life doesn’t have an inherent value in itself, as an abstract holy thing. Only the actual living individual is of concern for us. But that doesn’t mean that we should go carelessly around the question of violence. Anarchist violence must always be specific and aimed precisely, in correspondence with the ideas of the individual comrade who carries it out. Violence performed or defended under the banner of ideology is nothing but authoritarian. Anarchism should mean destroying all the abstract collectivist and ideological excuses that fuel the massacres and horrors of modern society, and bringing the responsibility to the unique individual. ◆

Ideology as authority vol. II

Orkanen, #4, vol. 1

This is a letter in response to 'S.', who in the previous issue (5th of August) framed ideology as authority in relation to human collateral damage. I will try to elaborate on the concept of ideology, by considering two often cohesive connotations that are especially relevant to this discussion; ideas and systems. Ideally, the life of an anarchist is saturated with ideas, particularly ideas of unhinged freedom severed from every kind of oppression, and every social order that upholds this oppression. Moreover, ideas of destroying that oppressive social order, by and large, spawning ideas of how and when. Ideas of fostering new bonds, new relationships, new spheres and spaces consisting of free, consenting individuals that live together in loving, creating, building, growing, desiring, and dying without any kind of authoritarian barrier; ideas of enjoying life without classes, classifications, and crucifixes. In this sense, ideas are crucial for the individual path to absolute freedom.

Now, anarchist ideas may be strong-hearted and everlasting, but unfortunately, they distort quite easily, when restrained under the pressure of systems, i.e. the second connotation of ideology chosen for this analysis. Derived from the concept of systems, you have structures, fixtures, design, and furthermore, determinism, limitations, inertia and stasis; none of which are the least desirable in the world of anarchy.

In my opinion, rebellious acts with human collateral damage as a 'by-product' are not necessarily the result of poor planning or lack of precision skills, simply due to the omnipresent impossibility of controlling every aspect of even the smallest actions. However, it can very well be the result of some wretched notion that human life is dissolvable under some superiour value/idea-based system. Therein dwells ideology as an authority; when you place ideas into a web of ranking orders and calculations; when ideas become doctrines; when you fixate so much on the validity and proposed universalism of an idea that you end up marginalizing its consequential act with its ever so present importance, repercussions, and perspectives. The pitfall is that ideas and systems are all too often in collaboration with one another, undermining the existence of anarchist ideas.

The question remains, whether or not it is possible to embrace any kind of ideology without embracing any kind of system at the same time. Regardless, we should always think of ideas as free from all kinds of restraints; just as we do with freedom itself. Perhaps by doing just that, ideology, in whatever shape or form, will never become an authority. ◆