

“Long live the Commune!” By Raoul Vaneigem¹

We live in the clarity of the obscure. What the spectacle of the world shows us in the glare of its footlights is only the staging of commercial totalitarianism. It hides the desire to live, which is present in each person, in order to substitute for it the desire to profit from life's absence.

The newspapers of the arrogant European democracies have dedicated only a few lines to the insurrection in Oaxaca.² Never before have the journalists who demand freedom of expression for themselves so unanimously demonstrated (through their servility) their contempt for individual freedom. Their obedience to global greed unscrupulously dismisses that which is scandalous by definition: the cost-free services that human generosity demands. The economy, the race for money and power – there's the leitmotiv of the wretched representations in the media in which men, women and children are conditioned to become spectators of their own degeneration.

The empire of the commodity has raised resignation and cowardice to the level of virtues. It is a slap to the face of Western spinelessness that the inhabitants of Oaxaca have had the audacity to rebel against a corrupt governor, whose abuses of power do not differ from those that we have seen in virtuous Europe, though it is customary in Mexico for the municipal police and the paramilitary squads to shoot those who are discontented. Here in Europe, the bosses openly swindle the public good without having recourse to killers because the fatalism and despair of the masses work so well in their favor. We understand quite well that glorifying, analyzing and even simply daring to mention the example of Oaxaca is incongruous for those who are in the business of providing information.

It is up to us to find out that manifestations of life have no chance of being transmitted through means of communications that are subservient to the imperatives of the market.

The aspiration to live fully is an integral part of facts and events that cannot be totally corrupted or erased. Only the awareness of solidarity with what's most alive and human in us and between us can break the chains of the oppression that are forged everywhere by fear and contempt for oneself.

Today nothing is more important than letting individuals know that they aren't alone when they reject despair, recover their audacity and advance with determination towards constructing their lives by liberating territories that have been locked down and devastated by commercial totalitarianism.

¹ Raoul Vaneigem, “Vive la Commune!” dated 6 December 2007 and published as the preface to Georges Lapierre, *La Commune d'Oaxaca. Chroniques et considérations* (Rue des Cascades, 2008). Posted online by La Voie du Jaguar on 22 February 2012: <https://www.lavoiedujaguar.net/Vive-la-Commune>. Translated by NOT BORED! 23 May 2021. All footnotes by the translator.

² In May 2006, a nonviolent teachers' strike was violently attacked by the police. In response, the residents rebelled and ultimately formed the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca. Vaneigem had written about Oaxaca before writing the present text: cf. “Appeal from a partisan of individual and collective autonomy” (2 November 2006): <http://www.notbored.org/oaxaca.pdf>.

Those who like to glory in their roles as eternal victims say that we have learned nothing from history. The evolution of the world seems to prove them right. Failing to establish new values that are founded on life and the determination to assure its sovereignty, we are confronted with a void into which patriarchal values and the memories of past struggles against the State, the army, the police, religion and ideologies are jumbled together and swallowed up.

Today, work – the place where “we lose our lives saving it”³ – exercises a doubly harmful effect through its scarcity and its increasing investment in parasitical services. In fact, those who celebrate its virtues and, by guaranteeing more jobs, dangle in front of us the hope for a consumable happiness, are the same people who close factories because the stockholders make more money from the stock exchange than from work. At the same time, stockbrokers make useless and unnecessary work into an instrument for their personal enrichment. They sacrifice the production of raw materials, previously the highest priority, to the profit of businesses that are as artificial as they are random and whose fates are at the mercy of the speculative games played by the stockholders, and the salaried employees of those companies be damned. Europe, which prides itself on being the cradle of democracy, has become its coffin.

Everything that has demonstrated its harmfulness in the past returns like bad odors from a sewer: liberalism, that imposture that identifies individual freedom with predation; nationalism, the warmonger; religious fanaticism; the debris of Bolshevism; and the nostalgia for fascism.⁴ It is from the history of their inhumanity that men draw their lessons, reiterating in a parody that is both ridiculous and bloody the worst aberrations of the past. The alleged duty to remember, which teaches us the horrors of the past (wars, massacres, the Holy Inquisition, pogroms, extermination camps and gulags), perpetuates the old religious dogma of a congenital powerlessness to defeat evil; honor prescribes our opposition to the ethic that rests upon free will the way a fakir sits upon a chair made of nails.

Memory only retains the defeats of the various efforts made over the centuries to make life better. Anacharsis Cloots, Jacques Roux, and [Gracchus] Babeuf, all beheaded by the Jacobins; the Paris Commune crushed by the Versailles; the workers and peasants councils liquidated by Lenin and Trotsky; the Spanish libertarian collectives destroyed by the Stalinists – *these are defeats? Really?*

What I call a “defeat” is the suffocation of individual freedom by liberal individualism, by the lie of identity-based nationalism, by the imposture of so-called Communism, by corrupted socialism and democracy, by the dictatorship of economic freedoms. Can’t you see that what has been attempted in favor of life, apparently vanquished by the weapons of death, has in fact been ceaselessly reborn? It is from the incompleteness of this effort that we must draw our lessons, because it is up to us to go much further.

In this sense, the Oaxaca Commune is exemplary. A simple battle against a governor’s abuses of power and misappropriation of funds, the mobilization of the population, ends in the formation of a Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, initially dominated by politicians, including the traditional Leninist and Trotskyite debris. Then there’s the entry into the organization of the barricaders, of the urban population and of the indigenous Indian

³ Cf. the song by Pierre Bertrand, “*On perd sa vie à la gagner*” (1980). YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D03zLk4yMUK>.

⁴ This sentence and some of what follows it also appear in Vaneigem’s “Homage to André Aubry,” which was written at roughly the same time as the present text (December 2007): <http://www.notbored.org/Aubry.pdf>.

communities of the surrounding regions, which limits and breaks up the maneuvers and the stranglehold over the assembly by the men of power.

This declaration⁵ has great clarity:

“What we want today constitutes the worst crime in the eyes of governments and criminal bosses and exploiters: we want justice and dignity; we want to no longer fear expressing our ideas; we no longer want to be victims of segregation due to the color of our skin, our thoughts, our language or our tastes; we want healthy food that we obtain through our work and no longer to be robbed by the rich; we want to employ our creative energy for the common good; we want the release of our people who have been imprisoned. We want the freedom to choose our way of living and that no one can impose upon us his lies, violence or manner of governing; and we know that what we want is correct and just.

“We want to become brothers and sisters in this struggle from the bottom up with all those people who, in the city or in the inland regions, have, like us, resisted all the masters of power and money; we want to pair our experiences in the struggle with [those from] the smallest corners of our State; we want dialogue and exchanges with all the women and men of Oaxaca.”

It is high time that – reacting against the passivity, the lack of creativity, the fatalism, and the obedience to political and labor union bureaucrats – European democrats – degraded, cretinized and duped by the corrupted democracies that they have put into power – discover in the desire for emancipation that is manifesting itself in Oaxaca the awareness of the human dignity that, from the French Revolution to the Occupations Movement in May 1968, hasn't stopped making its demands heard.

I call for solidarity with those who “actively participate in the current social movement and want it to remain faithful to the principles of autonomy and independence with respect to the political parties by asserting that the sovereign assembly is the most just and harmonious way to understand ourselves, to organize ourselves in an autonomous fashion and to govern ourselves successfully. The assembly is a place where the agreements reached by the people aren't founded upon the predominance of the majority over the minority or upon any of the other ways of imposing points of view commonly used by the power of those on high, but upon mutual respect among and between all members of the community.⁶ Here ‘autonomy’ is understood to be the construction of other realities that show that there is another way of changing things at the source, a way in which the people decide upon their own ways of living, not within institutions that only seek to reform oppression and repression, like the political parties that produce tyrants

⁵ Manifiesto of 15 March 2007, Voces Oaxaqueñas Construyendo Autonomía y Libertad (VOCAL), French translation: <http://cspcl.ouvaton.org/spip.php?article462>. Spanish original: <https://regeneracionradio.org/archivos/924>. Our English translation of the French has been double-checked for accuracy against the original Spanish.

⁶ Without any indication, Vaneigem has dropped out this intervening sentence: “In such a place, we therefore propose to struggle to construct, consolidate and link together autonomies, estimating that the autonomy of peoples, groups, collectives, individuals, organizations and others constitute a real alternative for opposition to the current authoritarian governmental system.”

of both genders, bigwigs and an authoritarianism among all those who gain access through positions that confer some kind of authority upon them.”⁷

This is [real] democracy. It has always wanted to be everything. It was something compared to the tyrannies that prohibited it. It is nothing but a toy rattle in the hands of the multinationals and commercial interests.

Exploitation and the inhumanity that it produces haven’t changed – a slave who dies at work has always permitted his owner to purchase two more – they have simply corrupted the totality of the planet. But it is also on this planet, the life of which is threatened, as are the lives of billions of living creatures, that an International of the Human Being will emerge. It will be confused, uncertain, groping its way forward; as the Zapatistas say, it will not be a model, but an experiment.

Though they are condemned to contempt, discredit and clandestinity, the resistance to oppression and the aspiration for a creative and happy existence have never ceased to arise. It is in vain that spectacular obscurantism and its flunkies try to drown out with their sonorous inanities the racket of hammered pots and pans with which the women of Oaxaca sound the call of a population armed only with the will to live. No silence can hide the sound of breaking chains.

⁷ Ibid.