

Violent Pacifism

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Lately, a particular pacifist discourse is prevailing in Basque Country, a discourse which, under the disguise of pacifism, has an absolutist form and Catholic Apostolic content. This pacifism is violent, for it wants to impose its morals to others. It claims that in order to advance in the political normalization (in the Basque Country) and since the principle of human dignity stands over everything else, it is nowadays mandatory for everybody in Basque Country to accept, in an absolute way, that nothing justifies the use of violence. In this sense, it preaches an absolute morality that stands on the grounds of an abstract human dignity and carries an absolutist reading of human rights. All this is mixed with a blind admiration about moral and political order.

Lenin properly stressed that, instead of just one kind of pacifism, there are rather many of them and they need to be well distinguished from one another. In his writing about war and peace, «Bourgeois Pacifism and Socialist Pacifism», for instance, he denounced that French pacifism was purely chauvinist, and he separated bourgeois pacifism from socialist pacifism. Hence, just like there is a bourgeois pacifism, there is also an imperialist pacifism (we go to Libya in order to establish peace...), as well as revolutionary pacifism (which practices civil disobedience, Gandhi, for example). It can also be considered as a Marxist critique that, if pacifism is preached without criticizing injustice, it becomes legitimating discourse of power. For this reason, as the Anglican priest Desmond Tutu himself already warned us, «if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have already chosen oppressor's side».

It seems that, rather than reconciliation, it is moral victory what violent pacifism of our country is seeking. How? As Moses descended from the Mount Sinai to his people with God's commandment tablets, so has done Jonan Fernandez, spokesman of Baketik (Basque peace organization), descending from Arantzazu with the new and sacred pacifism tablet. This is the gospel: «Everything that happened, the violence and violation of human rights, was possible because in the reasoning of some people and groups, the value of their cause prevailed over the value of human dignity. It is necessary to learn for the future, that no cause, aim, National interest (reason of the State) or defense of a right, nothing at all, stands over human dignity». It must be hard to find such a metaphysical and Catholic discourse in so few lines.

In fact, this absolute value of human dignity that no State or United Nations can give me, what is it about? It is based on faith. But politically, human dignity stays under the management of states, and the guarantee of that management, in United Nations, which is constituted by those states. So, the snake is biting its own tail. Anyway, to say that using violence in defense of something is to violate human dignity, apart from being a huge simplicity, is also a big lie, a metaphysical principle contrary to the whole history. As a matter of fact, if human dignity can be based on something, that will be the level of freedom and rights of individuals and groups, not an abstraction. It is specifically in defense of this concrete human dignity that oppressed groups (black people, slaves, Basque people...) have used violence in history; in other words, it is in the defense of human dignity and against right violating States that peoples have used violence. The problem is, therefore, that this pacifism, instead of relating it to concrete rights and freedoms, understands dignity in an abstract way.

What is the philosophical base of this doctrine? Since it places an unjustified point as supreme principle, it has a dogmatic base. If human dignity is to be taken as a principle, they present pacifism as a doctrine that necessarily derives from it. The problem is that also a people which uses violence, has its grounds precisely in human dignity. In fact, it is possible to arrive to different conclusions and practices from the same principle, and this doesn't make any of the some of the conclusions more legitimate or morally more correct than the others. But, as this pacifism understands its doctrine as the only one possible, it becomes absolutist and violent, for it doesn't accept different kinds of morality. It dreams as well about a perfect moral order and society, and forgets the fact that the human being has never stopped being an animal.

It is based on sweet slogans that get to our ears: «make love, not war»; «violence only brings more violence»; «nothing can justify violence»... it is around all this phrases which are far from reality that the particular pacifism I'm talking about is built. During the Spanish civil war, the pacifist George Orwell fought with the Trotskyist party POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), in 1936-37, and some years later, when writing about the civil war, he sublimely criticized: «We have become too civilized to grasp the obvious. To survive you often have to fight, and to fight you have to dirty yourself. War is evil, and it is often the lesser evil. Those who take the sword perish by the sword, and those who don't take the sword perish by smelly diseases. The fact that such a platitude is worth writing down shows what the years of rentier capitalism have done to us» (George Orwell. «Looking Back on the Spanish War». Chapter II).

In any case, what is this pacifist discourse looking for? It wants moral victory, and therefore, war. It joins (comes together with) the war discourse of the institutional pacifism of Spanish discourse: guilt, forgiveness, regret... laic theology. It is necessary someone to be guilty in order to ask for forgiveness, it goes without saying. Who is the guilty one? Jonan Fernandez has no qualms about blaming the ideology and praxis of the *abertzale* left. Fernandez's pacifist position is clear, for he implicitly accepts the thinking of the Spanish empire.

Lately, we've heard that in order to gain peace, we need to have a peaceful thinking. That's is very nice. But what did they have to do in Kukutza (a house occupied on Bilbo, which transformed Rekalde's –a neighborhood of Bilbao- cultural live, and then was demolished with the repulse of most of the residents), turn the other cheek and wait to be beaten and arrested? What are Saharan people supposed to do, keep sitting in their camps and preach pacifism? And what about Palestine? That pacifist discourse has no right to impose its dogma as the only one possible, valid and acceptable from a metaphysical instance (all violence is wrong). In the name of what? What we need to accept is that violence, lacking any other way out, has been the only alternative for many people and groups throughout history, and that the left can't look down on this instrument for the future. As well as pacifist ways are utterly respectable, it is also necessary to learn to respect other choices too.

Hence, instead of delegitimizing (questioning the legitimacy of) violence from a metaphysical instance, it seems that the duty of the pacifist should be to fight for the cultural, social and political conditions that would make peace possible. In fact, are there in our country political conditions for gaining peace, in a state which tortures, rapes and does whatever it wants with youngsters, without even admitting it? Rather than paying attention to the justification of violence that *abertzale* left has supposedly done, this devoted pacifist should look into the hidden and never acknowledged state terrorism that this people has suffered for 50 years (and more), thus, probably, peace would be closer for everyone.