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Author: Lanki

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6. DEEP-ROOTED SOLIDARITY

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROOTING IN THE EXPERIENCE

Both in the foundational thought of the Experience and in its actual course, the rooting of this movement among the Basque people has been an idea and is a present reality. We can illustrate, with some of the many allusions to the subject that appear in the in-depth work *The Cooperative Man*, the meaning of the “Basque people” that impregnates our cooperative project.

- “...a country that has to its credit having achieved an enviable level of development in the past and having been the birthplace of a democratic management capacity in its popular institutions”.
- “Our cooperation includes a versatile projection and it is supported by a pluralistic, free, democratic society. This is the strength that flows from the idiosyncrasy of our people and lives in the most beloved of its men”.
- It is, he would say, a formula that is more in accordance with the Basque idiosyncrasy and its sense of community than capitalism.
- “Cooperatives are created to keep human and social values alive and functioning in the heart of an old nation with typical resistance and renewing capacity, worthy of better luck”.
- He insists that his model should not be understood as a mere economic formula that is more or less right, reduced to a specific form of organizing the company, but rather as an action guided to “making a country”, as would be said in those times, to raise all the Basque people from their prostration. Arizmendiarieta expects democracy to lead to the extension of these trials, so that the Basque people can assume self-management, the individual and collective responsibility, in all the fields of human, cultural, and social problems.

In fact this aspect, in relative terms, was not especially important in Arizmendiarieta's thought. It is a dimension that appears to be buried in the post-war period and that reappears more clearly in Arizmendiarieta's last texts. We can summarize two fundamental ideas of his thought on this aspect:

1. The emergence of cooperativism within the Basque people is not by chance, it has to do with, among many other factors, the idiosyncrasy and profound attitudes of these people.
2. The cooperative impulse is also created among other dimensions, such as the service to the development and emancipation of these people in particular, of the Basque Country from which it inherits its community spirit.

However, this rooting does not have to be exclusivist. The fact that you recognize yourself as the heir and the person responsible for the spirit of a nation, and feel committed to its future, is, without a doubt, an important motivation in the cooperativism of Arizmendiarieta. It is possible to combine this dimension with an open attitude of exchange and universal vocation. The question resides, as is common, in the extent and in the priorities, and not in losing instigating motivations.

THE MOTIVATING CHARACTER OF THE ROOTING

This dimension of rooting, apart from being a sign of identity of our trajectory, can have an important function in the future of the Arizmendiarieta Cooperative Experience: it is a component (real and potential) of the motivation and the implication in the cooperative project.

As we have mentioned in other chapters, the impulse of the implication and the cooperative energy, both in the cooperative social body and in the new generations, has multiple challenges and dimensions. Rooting is one of these dimensions. It is an aspect to keep in mind when drawing up the business and social transformation project that we want to project towards the future.

We could outline this from a negative aspect: the loss of rooting in MCC, the loss of ownership and commitment with the Basque society, in the long term, can lead to losing the potential of one of the dimensions that identifies the cooperative social body. Perhaps as a simple business project we could imagine some companies, which are more or less close or far away geographically, progressing as a corporation. However, as a real cooperative social project, we should inevitably go deeper into notions such as the "geographical-cultural centre of the Experience", "dimensions of the cooperative culture and its focalisations", "educational and regeneration flow", etc.

EXPANSION AND COHESION

The cooperative project has a business aspect and a social aspect that are intimately bound together. The business aspect impels us to create subsidiaries, mixed companies etc. The social aspect requires going deep into cohesion and regeneration of the commitment and identification with the social transformation project.

The *expansion* can also be important for the business aspect of the cooperative project, along with the *meaning* for the social aspect of the cooperative project. It appears that we are entering in a duality, but this apparent duality is not at all unsolvable if appropriate formulas are found for it. In fact, the wise combination of these two aspects (social and business) has been a key factor in the cooperative Experience.

It has been said that three stages can be distinguished in the Experience. The first would have the Christian-ethical impulse as its driving force. In the second, the impulse of loving the country, of "making a country" as a motivation of the cooperative work would prevail. The third would be the time of pragmatism in the face of the greatest globalisation and demands of competitiveness. These are three suggestive dimensions, with different weights at each time, but which can contribute by instigating strength in the same direction, also in the future and among other factors. It is evident that with only the pragmatic dimension the implication and regeneration of a cooperative project cannot be sustained. It may be necessary to pay attention to all the potential instigating dimensions, both of this generation and of those that are now arising from the educational environment.

IMPULSE TO SELF-MANAGE THE ENVIRONMENT

As we will analyse in the "Integral Development " chapter, Arizmendiarieta's thought drives a multidimensional project of social transformation, beyond the business and economic aspects, aiming towards the integral development of the person and the community. Arizmendiarieta saw realities and institutions in the Basque Country that progress in this direction:

If our attention is re-projected on our earth it will find that there are other institutions that have been secularly self-managed in the promotion and resolution of an extensive range of community problems (CLP,I, 240).

Nowadays this "self-managing" reality is still present in our environment. It is curious that it is not connected to the Cooperative Experience, or with its individualist thought, which could give it greater coherence and consistency. In any case, the **self-organization of the Basque society is important in its reality and potentiality.** We can point out some features of this environment:

- The Experience has been developed in an area which has one of the languages with the greatest historical depth in the world and which is

fighting to project its past towards the future. A language which, in spite of the great effort and advance made, is still in a "challenge for life" in the face of strong forces that push towards cultural and linguistic standardisation.

The work in favour of the Basque language has created an important network of organizations, companies, associations and movements that lead the social impulse for the Basque language. Some institutions where the typical capitalist position does not prevail, which combine (more or less successfully) voluntary impulse with professional effectiveness, are institutions in which an interesting utopian and social sensitivity load is present.

- The Basque society is the western society where there are more "atypical" organizations and institutions, which do not fit into a purely lucrative or public-administrative logic. It is a society, in the heart of Europe, with a great "social energy" as can be seen in many figures: broad movements such as the Ikastolas (Basque-speaking Schools) or AEK (Association to promote the Basque language), the fact that there are 200,000 people registered in some kind of social movement (ecology, insubordination, pacifism, etc.), the fact that it has the greatest number of co-operators *per capita* in the Third World, etc. The Basque society is a live society that stands out in many aspects of social and community dynamism. This is a reality that has been often hidden by the political conflict, but which appears in any aspect of social life.

In short, we live in a society that is not anomic and is **atypically dynamic within the western world**. This must be said without idealizing anything, with the awareness that we are part of the opulent western society and that powerful tendencies exist towards individualistic standardisation, but also knowing how to value the positive aspects, with the figures in our hands. We are a society which, due to its identifying memory, its plurality, its load of solidarity, its organizational tendencies, is a focus of praxis of proposals that are made from critical-utopian positions in the world. A nation that can be a privileged field to experience a kind of more self-managed society, closer to individualistic humanism that overcomes the prevailing model of development.

FLOW OF IDEAS AND NETWORK OF RELATIONS

We are, therefore, in a country with especially important potentialities (within the difficulties described in first chapter, to try and progress in the direction of the transforming and cooperative social project from a individualistic perspective). This is the greatest contribution that we can make in the face of an unprecedented "human disorder" that demands new models for the future.

In this field, in the light of this potential, the Cooperative Experience has the opportunity to self-criticise its relative isolation as regards other social and self-organizational realities in its environment. The Cooperative Experience has not established a flow of ideas or a network of relations with these realities.

Synergies have not been developed in this sense. The lack of exchange can even be felt in the most elementary aspects. To a great extent the cooperative world ignores the challenges, realities and contributions that are being produced in other areas of its own environment. At the same time, in the wide and diverse world of community institutions, social organizations of the Basque language, social movements, Ikastolas etc., they hardly know the principles, challenges and contributions of the Experience, or the individualist thought that impels it (Arizmendiarieta, by the way, continues to be a complete stranger in his country, when his thought has enormous potential in many aspects in recent times)

We could progress towards the creation of a network of relations to jointly point in the direction of a self-managed society. However, this is difficult if previously there is no flow of ideas and experiences. It is time to progress in this sense, even in a wider plane, going beyond the community and self-organized organizations, we can also impel a progressive open debate with political forces, unions, universities and other authorities in the socio-economic model to which we aspire and the opportunity to walk towards a country with increasing self-managed areas. In this country, together as a nation we can make a unique contribution, within the diversity of responses that human emancipation demands at the beginning of the 21st century.

Questions for debate:

- What lines should we take as regards the expansion outside of our territory? Should we maintain the Basque territorial environment in an unequivocal way? Where should we place our priorities?
- If we back expansion outside of the Basque Country how can we articulate this expansion so that it becomes compatible with the rooted character of the cooperative network?
- Can the cooperative illusion be regenerated in the cooperative social body of the future if the "country" factor, the Basque-identifying dimension of the cooperative project, disappears? Can this identifying dimension play a part in it?
- What importance do we give to the impulse of the Basque language at work? What relationship does the linguistic-identifying aspect have with our cooperative project? And what relationship does it have with the satisfaction and implication of the current and new generations?
- Is the cooperative world aware that it is situated in a society with special social dynamism compared with other western societies and that a great potential of organizations and movements exists with which to share projects and experiences along the lines of a social cooperative transformation?
- What nexuses can be created between what is currently the cooperative reality and other self-organized realities in the environment?
- How can we start creating a flow of ideas around a more cooperative society project? How can we create areas for debate about the future with political forces, intellectuals, and unions?