

# **What Is Anarchism? An Introduction**

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# **Publisher's Introduction**

We are often asked to explain what anarchism is all about, and hope to publish a revised and expanded version of Nicolas Walter's popular *About Anarchism* when it is ready. Meanwhile we suggested to Donald Room, creator of the anarchist Wildcat cartoons, that he should produce a pamphlet on Anarchism. The first part of this compilation (pages 1 to 28) is his response.

He writes, "My contribution is intended to describe anarchism as it appears to anarchists in general, in Britain at the end of the twentieth century. The three headings, 'What anarchists believe, How anarchists differ, What anarchists do,' are taken from Nicolas Walter's 1969 pamphlet *About Anarchism*, and ways of putting points are lifted from many other contemporary anarchists." He adds that he "takes personal responsibility for the opinions and errors".

Freedom Press are responsible for the second part, consisting of excerpts from Freedom Press titles (except for those of Charlotte Wilson and George Nicholson, which were nevertheless published in *Freedom*). Few of these were written "at the end of the twentieth century", but we are confident that politically informed readers of the left will recognise their relevance to today's situation.

The Marxists, who until yesterday paid homage at the Lenin Mausoleum, and are now either disillusioned or wise after the collapse of communist dictatorship in Soviet Russia, are referred to page 58, to Malatesta's prophetic words, *written in 1920*:

to achieve communism before anarchy, that is before having conquered complete political and economic liberty, would mean (as it has meant in Russia) stabilising the most hateful tyranny, to the point where people long for the bourgeois regime, and to return later (as will happen in Russia) to a capitalist system ..."

As *has* happened in Russia!

As democratic socialism aspires to the votes that would secure office and power, it moves to conform to popular prejudice, and in the process becomes more and more remote from socialism. More and more genuine socialists are recognising that there is nothing left of socialism in the Labour Party. What can they do? Reform the party? Go for proportional representation (another electoral gimmick) and end up with the Liberals? Start another party? Remember the Gang of Four who were going to break the mould, and have ended up in the House of Lords, and Shirley Williams lecturing at Harvard!

The "road to power" is not the "road to socialism". For libertarian socialists, there is only one "road", and that is in the "political wilderness" with the anarchists, knowing where we want to go!

**Anarchism, an Introduction (by  
Donald Rooum)**

# What Anarchists Believe

Anarchists believe that the point of society is to widen the choices of individuals. This is the axiom upon which the anarchist case is founded.

If you were isolated you would still have the human ability to make decisions, but the range of viable decisions would be severely restricted by the environment. Society, however it is organised, gives individuals more opportunities, and anarchists think this is what society is for. They do not think society originated in some kind of conscious “social contract”, but see the widening of individual choices as the function of social instincts.

Anarchists strive for a society which is as efficient as possible, that is a society which provides individuals with the widest possible range of individual choices.

Any social relationship in which one party dominates another by the use of threats (explicit or tacit, real or delusory) restricts the choices of the dominated party. Occasional, temporary instances of coercion may be inevitable; but in the opinion of anarchists, established, institutionalised, coercive relationships are by no means inevitable. They are a social blight which everyone should try to eliminate.

Anarchism is opposed to states, armies, slavery, the wages system, the landlord system, prisons, monopoly capitalism, oligopoly capitalism, state capitalism, bureaucracy, meritocracy, theocracy, revolutionary governments, patriarchy, matriarchy, monarchy, oligarchy, protection rackets, intimidation by gangsters, and every other kind of coercive institution. In other words, anarchism opposes government in all its forms.

In a government society, anarchists may in practice apply to one coercive institution for protection from another. They may, for instance, call on the legal establishment for protection against rival governments like violent criminals, brutal bosses, cruel parents, or fraudulent police. “Do as I say or I’ll smash your face in” is often a more frightening threat than “Persons guilty of non-compliance are liable to a term of imprisonment”, because the perpetrator of the threat is less predictable. But the differences between different levels and forms of coercive institutions are less significant than the similarities.

For dictionary purposes, *anarchism* may be correctly defined as opposition to government in all its forms. But it would be a mistake to think of anarchism as



essentially negative. The opposition to government arises out of a belief about society which is positive.

## **Anarchy**

The ideal of anarchism is a society in which all individuals can do whatever they choose, except interfere with the ability of other individuals to do what they choose. This ideal is called *anarchy*, from the Greek *anarchia*, meaning absence of government.

Anarchists do not suppose that all people are altruistic, or wise, or good, or identical, or perfectible, or any romantic nonsense of that kind. They believe that a society without coercive institutions is feasible, within the repertoire of natural, imperfect, human behaviour.

Anarchists do not “lay down blueprints for the free society”. There are science-fiction stories and other fantasies in which anarchies are imagined, but they are not prescribed. Any society which does not include coercive institutions will meet the anarchist objective.

It seems clear, however, that every conceivable anarchy would need social pressure to dissuade people from acting coercively; and to prevent a person from acting coercively is to limit that person’s choices. Every society imposes limits, and there are those who argue, with the air of having an unanswerable argument, that this makes anarchism impossible.

But anarchy is not perfect freedom. It is only the absence of government, or coercive establishments. To show that perfect freedom is impossible is not to argue against anarchism, but simply to provide an instance of the general truth that nothing is perfect.

Of course, the feasibility of anarchy cannot be certainly proved. “Is anarchy practicable?”, is a hypothetical question, which cannot be answered for certain, unless and until anarchy exists. But the question, “Is anarchy worth striving for?”, is an ethical question, and to this every anarchist will certainly answer yes.

## **“Anarchy” in the Sense of Social Disorder**

Besides being used in the sense implied by its Greek origin, the word “anarchy” is also used to mean unsettled government, disorderly government, or government at its crudest in the form of intimidation by marauding gangs (“military anarchy”).

This usage is etymologically improper, but as a matter of historical fact it is older than the proper one. The poet Shelley held opinions which are now called anarchis-

tic, but in his poem “A Mask of Anarchy, written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester”, he uses the allegorical figure of “Anarchy” to mean tyranny. (The poem was published several years after it was written, and by that time anarchists were beginning to call themselves anarchists.)

Both the proper and improper meanings of the term “anarchy” are now current, and this causes confusion. A person who hears government by marauding gangs described as “anarchy” on television news, and then hears an anarchist advocating “anarchy”, is liable to conclude that anarchists want government by marauding gangs.

Some anarchists have tried to overcome the confusion by calling themselves something different, such as autonomists or libertarians, but the effect has been to replace one ambiguity with another. “Autonomy” (which means making one’s own laws) commonly refers to “autonomous regions”, secondary governments to which some powers are devolved from the principal government. “Libertarian” is used in America to mean one who opposes minimum wages, on the grounds that they reduce the profits of employers.

The simplest way to avoid confusion would be to reserve the term “anarchy” for its etymologically correct meaning, and call social disorder by some other term, such as “social disorder”. Enlightened journalists are already following this practice.

## **Anarchism and Terrorism**

The word “terrorism” means planting bombs and shooting people for political ends, without legal authority. Wars use much bigger bombs, kill many more people, and cause much more terror, but wars do not count as terrorism because they are perpetrated with legal authority.

Terrorism has been used by anarchists. It has also been used by Catholic Christians, Protestant Christians, Mohammedans, Hindus, Sikhs, Marxists, fascists, nationalists, patriots, royalists and republicans.

The vast majority of anarchists, at all times and places, have opposed terrorism as morally repugnant and counter-productive. So have the vast majority of Christians and so on, but in their cases it is not necessary to say so. In the case of anarchists it needs to be emphasised that they abhor terrorism, because malicious and ill-informed persons sometimes portray anarchists as wild-eyed bombers with no opinions at all, just an insane urge to destroy.

The “anarchist bomb-thrower” is a folk-myth, mostly derived from literature. It was originated in the “penny bloods” of the nineteenth century, and revived with

gusto by the writers of “boys’ stories” in the early 1920s, when war was out of fashion but fictitious heroes still needed enemies.

Let it be emphasised. Only a small minority of terrorists have ever been anarchists, and only a small minority of anarchists have ever been terrorists. The anarchist movement as a whole has always recognised that social relationships cannot be assassinated or bombed out of existence.

## Some Arguments for Government

The difficulty of arguing the anarchist case today has been compared with the difficulty of arguing the atheist case in medieval Europe.

In the middle ages people never wondered whether God existed; they just assumed, without ever considering the matter, that the existence of God was self-evident. In our time people never ask themselves whether government is necessary; they just assume that the necessity is self-evident. And when anarchists question the need for government, many people fail to understand the question.

It was once put to me as an argument against anarchism, that “if everyone could choose what to do, no-one would elect to join the army, and the country would be undefended”. My interlocutor was not an idiot, but could just not imagine a world without “countries” that needed armies to defend them against foreigners.

Bemused people ask how anyone could be induced to work if there were no coercion (“who will clean the sewers?”). Yet everybody knows that being forced to do things is not the only reason for doing things. Rich people who can afford to do nothing, workers in their “own” time, people who enjoy their jobs, even people who ask how anyone could be induced to work if there were no coercion, do things for other reasons.

People who work in sewers have told me they are proud of the importance of their job. People do things because they enjoy doing them, or are proud of their skill, or feel empathy with the suffering, or are admired for what they do, or get bored doing nothing.

Fear of the lash, or penury, or hellfire, is not needed for inducing people to do useful things. It is needed to make people endure the stressful indignity which working-class people call “work”: responsibility without power, pointless drudgery, being talked down to by morons. Anarchists believe that everything worth doing can be done without “work”.

Many people confuse government with organisation, which makes them suppose that anarchists are against band leaders and architects. But organisers and leaders are not the same as bosses. Anarchists have no objection to people following instructions, provided they do so voluntarily.

Some who concede that organisation occurs without government insist that government is necessary for large or complex organisation. People in anarchy, they say, could organise themselves up to the level of agrarian villages, but could not enjoy the benefits of hydro-electric schemes and weather satellites. Anarchists, on the other hand, say that people can organise themselves freely to do anything they think worthwhile. Government organisation is only needed when the job to be organised has no attraction for those who do it.

Government is even thought by some to be responsible for pair-bonding. Until quite recently a couple might live together for years and bring up a family, yet their love would still be classed as a casual affair if they did not have a marriage licence from the state.

Another daft argument for government is that people are not wise or altruistic enough to make their own decisions, and therefore need a government to make decisions for them. The assumption behind this contention is, either that the government does not consist of people, or that the people in government are so wise and altruistic that they can not only make their own decisions, but also make decisions for others. But everyone can see that getting into power does not require wisdom or altruism; the essential qualification is to be keen on getting into power.

A particular instance of the argument, that people are not responsible enough to make their own decisions, is the contention that children need “discipline” to prevent them from growing up anti-social. Anarchists have compared this to the old argument that babies need to be tightly bound, to prevent them from injuring themselves by kicking.

It is hundreds of years since swaddling bands have been used, but there has still not been a single instance of a baby injuring itself by kicking. Nor has there been an instance of a child being spoiled by the rod being spared. Children benefit from a stable environment, but that is not the same as an authoritarian one.

## **Governments as Steps towards Anarchy**

There are theories on both the left and right of politics, which advocate a planned sequence of societies, culminating in anarchy but beginning with a new kind of authoritarian society.

Best known of these is classical Marxism, which holds that the state will wither away, when people are so equal and interdependent that they no longer need restraint. The first step towards this goal is to impose a very strong government, of people of good will who thoroughly understand the theory.

Wherever Marxists have seized power, they have behaved like other people in power. Marxists accuse them of betraying the revolution, but anarchists think the

pressures of power make all bosses behave in substantially the same way. (The anarchist Michael Bakunin predicted as early as 1867 that Marxist government would be “slavery and brutality”.)

There are self-styled “anarcho-capitalists” (not to be confused with anarchists of any persuasion), who want the state abolished as a regulator of capitalism, and government handed over to capitalists. Many go no further, but some see the concentration of power in the hands of capitalists as the first step towards a society where every individual is his or her own boss.

Other forms of government advocated as intermediate steps on the road to anarchy are world government, proliferation of small independent states, government by priests, and government by delegates of trade unions.

The anarchists, and the anarchists alone, want to get rid of government as the first step in the programme.

This does not mean they suppose government can be abolished overnight. It means they think the idea of educating people for freedom, by intimidating them into submission, is an absurd idea. Anarchists struggle for freedom from coercive institutions by opposing coercive institutions.

Until and unless a society free of government exists, nobody can be absolutely certain that such a society is feasible. If it is not, then Marxists and others who set up a strong government in the hope of eliminating government, do not just fail to attain their objective, but end up with more of what they were hoping to eliminate. Anarchists at least give themselves a chance of ending up with a society freer than it would otherwise have been.

Reformists measure progress by how near they are to attaining power. Anarchists measure progress by the extent to which prohibitions and inequalities are reduced, and individual opportunities increased.

## **The Origin of Government**

For most of its existence, the entire human species lived by foraging. Modern foraging societies inhabit widely different environments, in rain forests, tropical deserts and the Arctic. Nevertheless they have similar ways of social organisation, so it seems reasonable to suppose that prehistoric foragers were similarly organised.

There are no rulers, bosses, chieftains, or elected councils. Day-to-day decisions are made by consensus. The rules of good behaviour are decided by custom and consensus, and enforced by what some anthropologists call “diffuse sanctions”.

Anarchists do not advocate return to a foraging economy, but use the fact that our ancestors lived for a million years without government as evidence that societies without government are viable.

This leaves anarchists with a question to be answered. If the first human societies were anarchies, then the first government must have arisen out of anarchy. How can this have happened?

There is no historical record of the event, because writing was not invented until governments were well established. But there are plausible conjectures, consistent with archeological and anthropological evidence.

Farming people, unlike foraging people, need to predict the cycle of seasons, so that they know when to do the planting. For early farmers, the method of prediction was to observe and remember the movements of the stars, a skilled job which must be done when most people are asleep. Perhaps early farmers had specialists in weather prediction. Perhaps these specialists acquired a reputation for actually controlling the weather, and were given privileges in return for ensuring that the seasons followed the required sequence.

A reputation for magical power does not in itself, however, make anyone into a boss. Anarchists see a more likely origin of government in systematic robbery.

Early farmers were probably harassed by foragers, who would of course regard a field of crops as a bonanza. There may also have been ex-farmers turned robbers because their crops had failed. Perhaps some of the robbers learned to take only part of the produce, leaving the farmers enough to live on. Perhaps they made themselves tolerable to the farmers by driving other would-be robbers away.

Anyway, by the time writing was invented the functions of weather controller and robber-defender were combined in the same person. A formidable combination of magic and coercion.

All over the world, there were royal families considered to be demigods, and a member of the royal family was chosen to become a god or the messenger of God, chief priest, absolute ruler, law-giver, and supreme commander of the armed forces.

Monarchy remained the universal form of top government for thousands of years, and most states retain some of the ritual trappings of monarchy.

## Democracy

“Government of the people, by the people, for the people” is a poetic phrase which uses “the people” in three different senses: the people as a collection of individuals, the people as the majority, and the people as a single entity. In prosaic terms, it means power over individuals, exercised by the majority through

its elected officers, for the benefit of the whole population. This is the ideal of democracy.

Voters in a democratic election contribute to the choice of who shall exercise power on behalf of the majority, and in doing so consent to be ruled by whoever the majority chooses.

For five thousand years, monarchy was the mark of civilisation. In less than two hundred years, the norm of civilisation has become democracy. Military usurpers used to claim, either that the throne was rightfully theirs, or that they were acting on behalf of the monarch. Military dictators today claim, either that they have a mandate from the people, or that they are going to organise elections when order has been restored.

It used to be generally accepted that people had a duty to surrender their power unconditionally to a hereditary monarch. Now the accepted form is for citizens to surrender their power periodically, to rulers chosen by majority voting.

Anarchists are against the surrender of power, and therefore against democracy. Not just against the perversion of democracy (though that is often mentioned), but against the democratic ideal. They do not want people to give power to whoever they choose; they want people to keep their power for themselves.

## **Making Progress Towards Anarchy**

Anarchists are extreme libertarian socialists, “libertarian” meaning the demand for freedom from prohibition, and “socialist” meaning the demand for social equality.

Freedom and equality are sometimes represented as antagonists, but at the extremes they coincide. Complete freedom implies equality, since if there are rich and poor, the poor cannot be permitted to take liberties with riches. Complete equality implies freedom, since those who suffer restrictions cannot be the equals of those who impose them.

Anarchists will not be content with anything less than complete freedom and complete equality, but they do not have an all-or-nothing attitude. They value partial freedom and partial equality. This is shown by the angry enthusiasm with which anarchists have agitated against the Poll Tax, the commercialisation of the National Health Service, anti-immigration laws, bad prison conditions, and the imprisonment of innocent persons.

Anarchists do not, however, help anyone to take power. They do not deny the sincerity of those who wish to use power for the improvement of society, but nobody can use power for anything, unless they first obtain it. The first aim of people seeking power, whatever they intend to do with it, must be to get and keep as

much power as possible. As a guide to action, anarchists assume that the *first aim* of power-seekers is the *only* aim. This is not the whole truth, but it is close enough for practical purposes.

The anarchist strategy for improving society is to influence public opinion. In the long run, rulers need the consent of the ruled. No government, however despotic, can keep going if it gets too much out of tune with public attitudes. If enough ordinary people are determined on some particular relaxation of government, then the government must either concede or fall.

A subtle indicator of anarchist success is a gradual diminution of respect for authority generally.

A more obvious, but paradoxical indicator of success in anarchist endeavours (in alliance with those seeking particular partial freedoms) is legislation, for instance the Acts of Parliament ending conscription, or prohibiting corporal punishment in schools. Apologists for government represent such legislation as a benefit of government. As anarchists perceive it, however, governments refuse to give up any power at all, except as an alternative to losing power entirely. When they are forced to surrender a little, they are astute enough not to do so with a grudging expression, but to wear a smile of generosity.

Freedom of speech and assembly, freedom from utter penury, freedom of access to water and medicine, which would have been considered utopian dreams in this country a couple of centuries ago, are now considered ordinary. In the anarchist view, these freedoms were not given by kind-hearted rulers, but conceded by bosses who felt threatened. And public pressure must be maintained, to deter the bosses from taking back what they have conceded.

By and large, the structure of society conforms to what most people think is right. If most people are persuaded by a small part of the anarchist message, the result is a small lessening of prohibitions or inequalities, a small widening of individual choices. The change may occur peacefully, or it may take an insurrection. The new structure of society then becomes the ordinary structure, from which people may be persuaded to demand a further widening of choices.

Every anarchist would like everyone in the world to be suddenly persuaded of the whole of the anarchist message, and for the change from oppression to anarchy to happen in a single, fantastic, revolutionary leap. But as realists, anarchists also value creeping progress in the right direction.



# How Anarchists Differ

## Misapplications of the Term “Anarchist”

An anarchist is one who opposes government in all its forms. But sometimes the term “anarchist” is misapplied to persons who do not in the least conform to the definition.

Sometimes “anarchist” is wrongly used for people who use illegal means for political ends which are not anarchist. Guy Fawkes, for instance, is sometimes described as an anarchist, although his aim was to replace the oppressive English regime with one resembling the Spanish, which was even more oppressive. A recent British group, given to destroying magazines in bookshops, called themselves “anarchists” although their aim was an increase in censorship.

Another misapplication of the term “anarchist” is to anyone bloody-mindedly fixed in their opinions. I once heard a drunk on a bus, loudly advocating all sorts of authoritarian measures, including conscription, capital punishment, and “send the farkin wogs back”, with occasional repetitions of “If anyone disafarkingrees, let ‘em farking disagree. I ain’t farkin inristid, I’m a farkin anarchist”.

There are also “anarchist” poseurs, like the sartorial stylists who paint A-in-a-circle symbols on their leather jackets without having the least interest in anarchism as an idea, and wrongly self-styled “anarchists” (“anarcho-capitalists”) who want to abolish the state as a regulatory and welfare institution, but do not oppose capitalist oppression.

## Differences among Real Anarchists

Anarchism, properly defined, embraces a wide range of different opinions, but differences of opinion do not in themselves lead to splits in the movement. Pacifist anarchists work alongside advocates of class violence, atheists alongside mystics, with occasional heated arguments but without rancour.

Let me not give the impression that anarchists never quarrel. There are deep and damaging splits, in which anarchists slag each other off as cheats, liars, thieves, agents of the secret police, and repulsive persons generally. But the basis of such

splits is personal antagonism, and it is rare in the anarchist movement for personal quarrels to be masqueraded as doctrinal disputes.

## **Intellectualists and Workerists**

The difference which most often causes anarchists to separate into different groups is a difference, not of political opinion, but of presentational style. Some anarchists like to present anarchism by explaining the ideas and arguing the case. Others are impatient of argument, preferring blunt statements and calls to working-class action.

In banter, they have referred to each other as “people who like to think of themselves as intellectuals”, and “people who like to think of themselves as working-class”.

The difference is not one of social class or educational background. “Intellectualists” include manual workers whose formal education stopped at compulsory school-leaving age or before, intellectual only in the sense of intelligent and thoughtful. “Workerists” include highly educated individuals from rich families, working-class only in the sense that at some time or other they have been paid, or expect to be paid, for doing something.

Where there are anarchists in sufficient numbers, intellectualists and workerists tend to organise separately. They exchange jocular insults, but in general they respect each other’s different tastes, and recognise that they complement each other’s efforts by addressing different audiences. When it seems useful, the work together amicably enough.

## **Individual Anarchism IS Class-Struggle Anarchism**

Many anarchists call themselves by secondary labels. Some, such as “pacifist anarchist” and “anarcho-syndicalist”, indicate a difference of opinions from other anarchists. Others, such as “anarchist communist” and “anarchist socialist” are just there to distinguish persons of anarchist persuasion from persons to whom the term “anarchist” is misapplied.

In modern parlance, “class-struggle anarchist” and “individual anarchist” are labels of the latter type.

A hundred years ago, “individualism” was used to mean competitiveness, and self-styled “individualist anarchists” had ideas something like those of the “anarcho-capitalists” of our time. Today, the term “individualist” is applied to anarchists who emphasize the importance of individuals.

Much more recently, the term “class-struggle” was used by adherents of an authoritarian political movement which denied the importance of individuals and extolled a faceless amalgam, significantly called “the masses”. Those who now call themselves “class-struggle anarchists”, however, are simply anarchists who emphasise that the struggle against oppression can only be won by oppressed individuals acting on their own behalf.

Self-styled class-struggle anarchists and self-styled individual anarchists are not in disagreement. The different choice of labels indicates no more than a difference of emphasis. They sometimes think they disagree, and suspect the bona fides of each others’ anarchism, but this is entirely the result of obsolete word associations.

It may be conjectured that those who style themselves class-struggle anarchists tend to the “workerist” taste, and individualist anarchists to the “intellectualist”; but if such a correlation exists at all, it is certainly not exact. Some taciturn activists call themselves individualists, and some self-styled class-struggle anarchists delight in hair-splitting verbosity.

## **Revolutionary Violence and Pacifist Anarchism**

With a few exceptions, anarchists are agreed that wars between governments should never be supported, and that group violence is acceptable only if it is used in furtherance of the anarchist revolution. The difference of opinion is about how much violence is useful.

At one extreme are those who argue that the revolution can only succeed if it involves no violence whatever. They contend that a society established by violent defeat of the bosses could only be maintained by violent suppression of the ex-bosses. Therefore violence cannot lead to anarchy, but only to a change of bosses.

At the other extreme are those who hold that any fighting between working-class people and the forces of authority, whatever the immediate motive and whoever wins, contributes to the revolution by showing that the bosses can be resisted. Anarchists of this persuasion have sometimes joined peaceful demonstrations and tried to provoke the police into attacking the demonstrators. (Anarchists are sometimes said to have caused riots by instructing peaceful demonstrators to attack the police. This is a ridiculous accusation. If people riot it is because they are angry, not because someone tells them to riot.)

Between the extremes of pacifism and bellicosity, most anarchists think violence is useful at some times but counter-productive at other times. In general they dislike violence because it is likely to end in defeat or injury, but they applaud successful risings, for instance the defeat of Ceausescu in Romania.

Anarchists have often joined armed resistance groups as individuals, and anarchist armies fought in Ukraine and Mexico in the 1920s, in Spain in the 1930s, and in Korea under Japanese occupation in the 1940s. In those countries now, the common stereotype of an anarchist is not a “mad bomber” but a freedom fighter.

There are anarchists now alive, who volunteered to fight against Franco in Spain, went to prison rather than join the British army to fight Hitler, and vociferously opposed the recent war against Saddam Hussein. They might be accused of inconsistency, in that they took arms against one dictator, but refused to take arms against two others equally bad.

In fact, however, their attitude is quite consistent, because it is positive. They act on their perception of what wars are *for*, rather than what they are against. The stated objective of the war against Saddam Hussein was to restore the monarchy in Kuwait. The stated objective of the war against Hitler was to preserve the British Empire. The stated objective of the anarchist fighters in Spain was a free society. Of these, only the objective of the Spanish war was considered worth fighting for.

## **Workers’ Control and Anarcho-Syndicalism**

All anarchists believe in workers’ control, in the sense of individuals deciding what work they do, how they work, and who they work with. This follows logically from the anarchist belief that nobody should be subject to a boss.

“Workers’ control” is also used with another meaning, that of power being vested in the workers collectively, and exercised in practice by elected officers of the workers. This idea is called syndicalism, from *syndicat*, the French for trade union.

Elaborate constitutions have been invented, for syndicalist systems of government. Typically there are to be workplace committees consisting of directly elected delegates, local committees consisting of delegates from workplace committees, and so on up the pyramid to a delegate committee which has overall control of industry. Delegates are also sent to local and national legislatures. The pyramid structure ensures that electors at different levels know their delegates personally, and delegates can be recalled at any time, which prevents them from making decisions contrary to the electors’ wishes.

The purpose of such proposed constitutions is not anarchistic but democratic; not to get rid of government, but to make government accountable.

A looser meaning of syndicalism, however, is quite compatible with anarchism. This is simply to use the power of the trade unions, not just to secure better wages and conditions, but to bring about real social change. If the social change is towards anarchy, this is called anarcho-syndicalism.

Many anarchists active in trade unions are anarcho-syndicalists. Other anarchist trade unionists, however, disagree with anarcho-syndicalism. They contend that an effective trade union must include workers of every political persuasion, whereas an effective movement for social change must restrict its membership to those who favour social change.

## **Anarchism and Religion**

The religious or anti-religious opinions of most anarchists are intertwined with their political beliefs.

“Neither God nor master” is a traditional anarchist slogan, expressing the belief that God is a lie, invented, to make slavery bearable. Many anarchists were atheists first and became anarchists later, after rejection of divine authority had cleared the path for rejection of human authority.

Many anarchists embrace conscious egoism, the doctrine that it is absurd to call shame on selfishness, because selfishness is unavoidable. The universe has no absolute centre; for a sentient being, the practical centre of the universe is the point from which the universe is perceived: the self. For God (if God exists), the centre of the universe is God. For me, the centre of the universe is me.

The notion of a supreme Deity, “a tyrant in Heaven”, is considered an excuse for tyrants on Earth, by anarchists who are atheists, conscious egoists, humanists, and agnostics.

On the other hand, there are anarchists for whom the worship of God is the very basis of their anarchism. They may believe that human authority is an affront to divine authority. Or they may believe on religious grounds that war is wrong, and on empirical grounds that war is inseparable from government.

There are Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Taoist, Hindu and Neopagan anarchists, for all of whom anarchism and religion are inextricable, as surely as anarchism and anti-religion are inextricable for other anarchists. One Neopagan has described the summer solstice gathering as “the principal event in the anarchist calendar”.

Anarchism implies tolerance of different beliefs, so long as those beliefs do not involve coercion. Religious and anti-religious anarchists may argue, but they do not reject each other. There are those, however, who think the term “Christian anarchist” an absurd self-contradiction.

## **Animals**

Anarchists are averse to suffering, and most are concerned to prevent suffering in non-human animals as well as humans. There have always been anarchists who were also vegetarians and vegans, and most meat-eating anarchists take an interest in humane slaughter.

Recently there has developed an animal welfare movement which goes beyond animal welfare to animal liberation, and with it a school of anarchist thought which sees human liberation as a special case of animal liberation.

## **Communism, Collectivism, Mutualism**

Although anarchists are careful not to “lay down blueprints for the free society”, they have arguments about what kind of social arrangements are compatible with freedom from authority. Some anarchists are communists in the strict sense, maintaining that all goods should be held in common. Others allow private ownership at individual and community level, but not ownership of a factory in which non-owners do the work, or ownership of land on which non-owners pay rent. Property in that sense is seen as theft.

Barter is rejected by anarchists, as any system which exchanges goods of equal value is designed to make sure the rich remain rich and the poor, poor. Money is also rejected by most anarchists, as no more than a system of trade tokens for the simplification of barter.

Some anarchists, however, believe that the banking system is fundamentally different from the barter system, and that money, not as trade tokens but as banking units, is essential for any complex economic undertaking. They think a central bank need not be a coercive institution, and must be a feature of any anarchy more complex than a series of self-sufficient agrarian communities.

This idea, called collectivism or mutualism, is not accepted by very many anarchists today, but was embraced by many nineteenth century anarchists whose work is still published and respected.

## **Optimists and Pessimists**

Anarchists have different opinions about how closely and how quickly the ideal of anarchy can be achieved.

It seems to some young anarchists that anarchism is so sensible and obvious that everybody must agree with the idea as soon as they hear about it. These young

anarchists are convinced that the revolution can be completed within a short time, if it is urged with enough energy.

Anarchists who have been in the anarchist movement for some time feel compelled to recognise that society is resistant to rapid change. The anarchist revolution has been urged for well over a century, but few have been convinced and progress is very slow.

There are various responses to this recognition. Some retire from the anarchist movement in disillusion.

Others just retire their political thinking from the real world, and persist willy-nilly in the conviction that one of these days, the workers will suddenly understand the message and government will be abolished in a twinkling. There is a group identified by some as anarchists (though they reject the term themselves), whose principal activity is to meet regularly and reiterate their faith in the coming, sudden, world revolution, in the manner of a religious group reiterating their faith in God.

There are anarchists who believe that wars and war preparations, penury, intolerance, oppression and other features of government are permanent features of society, and that therefore the only role for anarchists is “permanent protest”, calling attention to the injustices of society without hoping to change anything much.

A more optimistic idea is that “the anarchist revolution is now”. Society is not permanently fixed, but in a permanent state of transition, mostly slow but occasionally rapid. Some changes make government stronger and some make it weaker; but for the past few centuries, it can be argued, the overall trend of social change has been in the direction of wider individual choices.

Nobody makes the implausible claim that anarchist agitation has been solely, or mainly, responsible for this beneficial change. But optimistic, “revolution-is-now” anarchists believe that anarchism has made, and is still making, a useful contribution.

# What Anarchists Do

This chapter is intended to describe in general terms, without giving names, what goes on in the anarchist movement in Britain in the latter part of the twentieth century.

## How Many Anarchists Are There?

The size of anarchist movements has varied from place to place and from time to time. At some times and places the numbers have been overestimated, as people not of the anarchist persuasion have joined anarchist armies, trade unions and so on, and have been included as anarchists in the statistics. In this country now, the numbers may well be underestimated.

The listed membership of the several national anarchist organisations is a few hundred at most. The number of participants in the 1992 anti-election rally in Trafalgar Square was variously estimated at 750 and 1,200. The total circulation of anarchist periodicals is less than thirty thousand, including those sold to non-anarchists. Judging by these indicators, the anarchists are a minuscule minority.

Other indicators, however, suggest rather large numbers.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, large numbers of people marched from Aldermaston to London over the Easter weekends, in protest against atomic weapons. At first everyone marched as an individual, but later the participating groups were invited by the organisers to carry banners. More than one in forty of the marchers then declared themselves to be anarchists.

It seems fair to extrapolate from this that anarchists numbered more than one in forty of all those in favour of nuclear disarmament, perhaps one per cent of the total population.

Since about 1980 one of the polling organisations, ICM, has recorded the numbers of those who, when asked how they intend to vote, declare that they will not vote at all. The proportion of refusers-to-vote has seldom fallen below seven per cent.

There are many reasons for refusing to vote, but it seems a conservative estimate that one in seven of the refusers, or more than one per cent of the population, refuse to vote for the anarchist reason that "it only encourages them".



If it is correct that the anarchists are between one and two per cent of the adult population, then there are about half a million of them; a small minority, but not a minuscule minority.

The experience of most anarchists is that they had lived for some time before they encountered anarchism as a serious idea, so it seems likely that the number of unwitting and potential anarchists is larger than the number of self-identified anarchists.

## How Old Are Anarchists?

Members of anarchist groups are mostly young (under 35), some old (over 50), and only a few of middle age. Young anarchists often conclude that there must have been a decline in the anarchist movement a couple of decades past, or even that anarchism is a very recent idea; but this is a wrong conclusion. The age profile of the anarchist movement has been the same for fifty years at least.

What happens is that anarchists in their middle years stop attending anarchist group meetings, as their time is taken up with raising families and pursuing careers. They do not stop being anarchists or arguing the anarchist case, but they become less conspicuous. Later, when they have more spare time, some but not all of them reappear in the conspicuous movement.

At first sight political parties appear very different, in that their most conspicuous members are of middle age. But these middle aged activists are in fact paid organisers and career politicians. The age profile of *unpaid volunteers* in political parties is about the same as that of the conspicuous anarchist movement. We may conclude that the apparent shortage of middle-aged anarchists is caused by the absence of jobs and careers in the anarchist movement.

Because it is always true that most members of anarchist groups are young, the movement is always enthusiastic, energetic and full of fresh ideas. For the same reason it lacks patience and has little sense of its own history.

Sometimes a new anarchist group is founded where there was a flourishing group a few years earlier, and the new group knows nothing whatever of the earlier group. Ex-members of the earlier group look on approvingly, but do not introduce themselves because they are busy with their own affairs.

Young people in a movement where nearly everybody is young can take decisions on their own, which is one reason why older anarchists refrain from interfering. Inexperience and the over-optimism characteristic of youth cause a few failures. There are “mass meetings” at which only the organisers turn up because they have not been publicised, and magnificent publicity campaigns for book fairs, for

which noone has thought to book a hall. On the whole, however, young anarchists organise themselves quite well.

## How Anarchists Are Organized?

The anarchist movement consists of autonomous groups and individuals. They publish and distribute literature, organise meetings and demonstrations, run communes or free schools or advice centres or clubs, and discuss anarchism among themselves. Some groups do all these things, some just one. They may be named for a locality, or the function they choose to perform (“Such and such Press group”), or by some fanciful name.

As well as casual contacts between groups, there are several informal but deliberate communication networks, and three or four “national organisations” which consist in practice of autonomous groups in regular communication, who sometimes agree on common resolutions and take joint responsibility for publications.

A few groups have formal membership, but this is not usual. For the most part, the members of a group are those who are active in it. There are individuals intermittently active, of whom nobody is sure whether they are members of the group or not. Many are members of several groups simultaneously.

There are two anarchist methods of organising activities within the group. One is for the members to discuss what they shall do and arrive at a consensus, or occasionally a majority decision. The other, equally anarchistic, is for an energetic individual to declare an intention of doing something, and invite others to join in. Such “prime movers” may be flamboyant or retiring. They may or may not be designated functionaries like secretaries or convenors. Often, only the members of the group know who they are.

Middle-aged anarchists, in temporary retirement from conspicuous activity, often maintain contact by subscribing to a periodical or distribution network, or membership of a national organisation.

## Anarchist Literature

A seven-year old asked her anarchist parents, “Do anarchists have to sell books?”

Since advances in printing technology in the 1970s made publication less expensive, books, pamphlets, periodicals and free leaflets have become the most visible of anarchist activities. Some groups publish literature as one of many activities and some (including “groups” consisting on one individual) specialise in publishing. Printing is sometimes by amateurs, sometimes by local reprography shops,

and sometimes by an anarchist workers' co-operative which is a flourishing commercial printer.

The standard of books and pamphlets is good. There are many reprints of well-tried anarchist works. New work is generally well written and, if it includes illustrations, well drawn. Production is often very cheap to keep the price down, but with a few awful exceptions the product is neat and legible.

The standard of anarchist periodicals varies from excellent to abysmal. There are several useful fortnightly, monthly, and quarterly magazines and newspapers, some national and some local. Some community magazines, and some specialist newsletters, have a regular anarchist input. There are also numerous, short-lived anarchist fanzines whose chief merit is that they give their producers the experience of writing and publishing.

There are posters and free leaflets, some published in connection with specific events, and some intended to be timeless. Like the periodicals, they vary from excellent to rubbish.

Three groups, separately organised but regularly cooperating, now undertake the distribution of anarchist literature from publishers in Britain and other English-language countries, to commercial and radical bookshops everywhere.

Commercial publishers produce occasional anarchist works, but in this country no anarchist publisher or distributor makes a net profit. If there are any gross profits, they are reinvested. Distributors use their profits to subsidise publishing.

Recently there have been one or two illegal anarchist radio stations. There are some published recordings, and a few excellent videos, mostly produced by students using college equipment. No doubt we shall see more of these, as equipment becomes more accessible.

Anarchist literature is sold in commercial bookshops and radical bookshops including anarchist shops. Occasional anarchist bookstalls are put up at meetings, gigs, and festivals, and in colleges and sometimes street markets. There are also anarchist mail-order book services.

There are book fairs, at which anarchists congregate to sell literature (and some tee-shirts, badges and snacks) largely, but not exclusively, to each other. The oldest established of these, the annual Anarchist Bookfair in London, is the main regular anarchist gathering.

## Meetings and Demonstrations

Before television became common, street-corner soapbox oratory was a popular entertainment and there were some brilliant anarchist orators. Today, as far as I know, there are no regular outdoor anarchist meetings. There are regular indoor

public meetings, where although the public is invited, most of those who actually attend are anarchists.

Anarchists are more often seen in demonstrations organised by other groups, aimed at limited and specific widening of individual choices. In processions where banners are carried, anarchist groups may identify themselves, but anarchists often join demonstrations as unlabelled individuals. They include middle-aged anarchists in “temporary retirement” from the conspicuous movement.

Anarchists have always been involved in campaigns for nuclear disarmament. They were among those who organised the second Aldermaston March (the first was by a lone pacifist), and took part in the third and subsequent ones organised by CND (which was until 1964 an affiliate of the Labour Party). They were heavily involved in the Committee of 100 which demonstrated against the Bomb by obstructing traffic, and primarily responsible for the “Spies for Peace” who discovered and revealed the secret nuclear shelters called Regional Seats of Government. They took part in some of the “Peace Camps” at the gates of nuclear weapons bases. A group of anarchists went out in a dinghy to meet the first American nuclear submarine to be stationed in a Scottish loch, and actually succeeded in landing on its deck.

Aldermaston marches are no longer annual events, but there was one in 1989 in which many anarchists took part as individuals, and on the last day a large number of them suddenly produced wire cutters and attacked the fence around the Aldermaston site. This action had been arranged in advance through an anarchist network. Later an anarchist came across an obscure judicial ruling that a nuclear weapons establishment had a public right of way through it, and a group of anarchists embarrassed the guards by insisting on their legal right to walk through the fenced area.

When Nirex, the quango responsible for disposing of waste from nuclear energy plants, opened “information centres” in places where they intended to dump waster, one anarchist demonstrated, ingeniously and convincingly, that the staff of the “information centre” in Bedford had no information about nuclear dangers. He left a paper packet on a table in the centre, and told staff it contained mud from near Sellafield, emitting alpha radiation. The staff ran their Geiger counter over the outside of the packet and got no reading. When a journalist from the local newspaper turned up, they told him the story about alpha radiation was a hoax. The journalist was no nuclear physicist, but he had enough layman’s knowledge to know that alpha radiation does not penetrate paper, and was amazed to find that the staff of the “information centre” did not know.

Anarchists have been closely involved in successful agitations for changes of the law, such as the abolition of the death penalty, and the prohibition of corporal punishment in schools. In the case of the death penalty, the final, successful

agitation which followed the execution of Derek Bentley was begun by anarchists in London, with two meetings, the first called in the name of an anarchist group, and the second called by the same group calling themselves the League Against Capital Punishment. After the second meeting, the anarchists stood aside to let the League be taken over by the lawyers and politicians who had run earlier anti-hanging campaigns, and this time at last they were successful.

When a law was passed prohibiting landlords from including “no coloured” in accommodation advertisements, anarchists were among those who visited corner shops to tell the owners that their advertising boards were breaking the law.

A more recent successful campaign involving anarchists was against the Poll Tax. They were prominent in street demonstrations, and decorously made nuisances of themselves, taking up the time of magistrates’ courts with footling disputes.

Anarchists enthusiastically joined the workers in two big conflicts with the employers, the miners’ strike and the Murdoch printers’ strike, and many smaller ones.

Some anarchists are hunt saboteurs, and participants in the animal liberation movement. Recent events organised by anarchists have included “Bash the rich” marches towards the millionaire dwellings of Hampstead, and “Stop the City” demonstrations in the London financial centre.

Anarchists join demonstrations against racial victimisation by the police, and have been accused, probably falsely, of organising “race riots”. With or without anarchist banners, they often join demonstrations against tyrannies elsewhere in the world.

The most exclusively anarchist demonstrations occur at times of general elections, when all political groups are excited into activity, and anarchists run anti-election campaigns. Thousands of leaflets are printed and given away, dozens of meetings are held, and the meetings of candidates are heckled to make the anarchist point that politicians want us to surrender our power to them.

Agitation against an election appears to have no effect on the election, but the existence and opinions of the anarchist movement become known to people, including a few people who had not known they were anarchists.

## **Direct Action**

“Direct action” originally meant action such as strikes and sabotage, intended to have an immediate effect on a situation, as distinct from political activity which might have a round about effect through representatives, or demonstrative activity whose effect was to get publicity.

These days direct action is often used to mean demonstrations which are dangerous, or violent, or illegal, but whose intended, immediate effect is only to get publicity for an idea. I have included such actions under “Meetings and demonstrations” above. Here, I use the term “direct action” in something like its original sense, to mean anarchist activity which has a direct effect on the range of choices for some individuals.

There are anarchist workers’ co-operatives, which cannot avoid trading with capitalist society but are not directly dominated by a boss. There are anarchist communities, where people live in a non-authoritarian environment, sometimes holding all their assets in common. A few household communities are also workers’ co-operatives at the same time. The anarchists who live and work in them not only widen their own choices, but also demonstrate to the world that such non-authoritarian ways of life are feasible.

Anarchists are disgusted by the idea of houses standing empty when people are homeless, and have always supported squatters movements. Several anarchist groups run squatters advice centres, keeping lists of suitable empty buildings as well as giving legal advice. One group of anarchists were jailed for preventing the gutting of council houses to prevent squatting, and subsequently engaged by the council to organise squatting as a temporary, partial solution to the housing shortage.

There have been and are anarchist clubs, in rented and squatted premises. Some buildings squatted by anarchists have been opened as community resource centres, including cafes which sell very cheap food. Anarchist propaganda is available at such places, but not forced on anybody. Sometimes the organisers have been offered council grants for their services to the community, and sometimes they have accepted them.

Anarchists often undertake to visit and communicate with prisoners who have few other friends. Often the prisoners hold anarchist opinions or are deemed innocent, or both, but this is not always the case.

The last two paragraphs may make anarchists look like “dogooders”. They would object to that description. But their commitment to widening the choices of individuals is not just a matter of publicising anarchy and advocating revolution. It is also a matter of practical, direct action.

# **Anarchist Approaches to Anarchism**

# The Word “Anarchy” (Errico Malatesta)<sup>1</sup>

The word “anarchy” was universally used in the sense of disorder and confusion; and it is to this day used in that sense by the uninformed as well as by political opponents with an interest in distorting the truth.

We will not enter into a philological discussion, since the question is historical and not philological. The common interpretation of the word recognises its true and etymological meaning; but it is a derivative of that meaning due to the prejudiced view that government was a necessary organ of social life, and that consequently a society without government would be at the mercy of disorder, and fluctuate between the unbridled arrogance of some, and the blind vengeance of others.

The existence of this prejudice and its influence on the public’s definition of the word “anarchy” is easily explained. Man, like all living beings, adapts and accustoms himself to the conditions under which he lives and passes on acquired habits. Thus, having been born and bred in bondage, when the descendants of a long line of slaves started to think, they believed that slavery was an essential condition of life and freedom seemed impossible to them. Similarly, workers who for centuries were obliged, and therefore accustomed, to depend for work, that is bread, on the goodwill of the master, and to see their lives always at the mercy of the owners of the land and of capital, ended by believing that it is the master who feeds them, and ingenuously ask one how would it be possible to live if there were no masters.

So, since it was thought that government was necessary and that without government there could only be disorder and confusion, it was natural and logical that anarchy, which means absence of government, should sound like absence of order. Nor is the phenomenon without parallel in the history of words. In times and in countries where the people believed in the need for government by one man (monarchy) the word republic, which is government by many, was in fact used in the sense of disorder and confusion — and this meaning is still to be found in the popular language of almost all countries.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Anarchy*, first published in Italian in 1891, English translation published by Freedom Press.



Change opinion, convince the public that government is not only unnecessary but extremely harmful, and then the word anarchy, just because it means absence of government, will come to mean for everybody: natural order, unity of human needs and the interests of all, complete freedom within complete solidarity.

Those who say, therefore, that the anarchists have badly chosen their name because it is wrongly interpreted by the masses and lends itself to wrong interpretations, are mistaken. The error does not come from the word but from the thing; and the difficulties anarchists face in their propaganda do not depend on the name they have taken, but on the fact that their concept clashes with all the public's long established prejudices on the function of government, or the State as it is also called.

# The Ideal of Anarchy (Peter Kropotkin)<sup>1</sup>

Anarchism (from the Greek *an-* and *arche*, contrary to authority), the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government — harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being.

In a society developed on these lines, the voluntary associations which already now begin to cover all the fields of human activity would take a still greater extension so as to substitute themselves for the State in all its functions. They would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international — temporary or more or less permanent — for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and social needs. Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary — as is seen in organic life at large — harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the State.

If, it is contended, society were organised on these principles, man would not be limited in the free exercise of his powers in productive work by a capitalist monopoly, maintained by the State; nor would he be limited in the exercise of his will by a fear of punishment, or by obedience towards individuals or metaphysical entities, which both lead to depression of initiative and servility of mind. He would

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<sup>1</sup> This pedantic description of anarchy is from the entry on “Anarchism” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1910 edition (reprinted in *Anarchism and Anarchist Communism*, Freedom Press). The word “individualism” has changed its meaning since that time; Kropotkin uses it to mean competitiveness, while today it means the urge towards what Kropotkin calls “individuation”.

be guided in his actions by his own understanding, which necessarily would bear the impression of a free action and reaction between his own self and the ethical conceptions of his surroundings. Man would thus be enabled to obtain the full development of all his faculties, intellectual, artistic and moral, without being hampered by overwork for the monopolists, or by the servility and inertia of mind of the great number. He would thus be able to reach full *individualisation*, which is not possible either under the present system of *individualism*, or under any system of State Socialism in the so-called *Volksstaat* (Popular State).

The Anarchist writers consider, moreover, that their conception is not a Utopia, constructed on the a priori method, after a few desiderata have been taken as postulates. It is derived, they maintain, from an *analysis of tendencies* that are at work already, even though State Socialism may find a temporary favour with the reformers. The progress of modern technics, which wonderfully simplifies the production of all the necessaries of life; the growing spirit of independence, and the rapid spread of free initiative and free understanding in all branches of activity — including those which formerly were considered as the proper attribution of Church and State — are steadily reinforcing the no-government tendency.

The State organisation, having always been, both in ancient and modern history (Macedonian empire, Roman empire, modern European states grown up on the ruins of autonomous cities), the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities, cannot be made to work for the destruction of these monopolies. The Anarchists consider, therefore, that to hand over to the State all the main sources of economical life — the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on — as also the management of all the main branches of industry, in addition to all the functions already accumulated in its hands (education, State-supported religions, defence of the territory, &c), would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism. True progress lies in the direction of decentralisation, both *territorial* and *functional*, in the development of the spirit of local and personal initiative, and of free federation from the simple to the compound, in lieu of the present hierarchy from the centre to the periphery.

In common with most Socialists, the Anarchists recognise that, like all evolution in nature, the slow evolution of society is followed from time to time by periods of accelerated evolution which are called revolutions; and they think that the era of revolutions is not yet closed. Periods of rapid changes will follow the periods of slow evolution, and these periods must be taken advantage of — not for increasing and widening the powers of the State, but for reducing them, through the organisation in every township or commune of the local groups of producers and consumers, as also the regional, and eventually the international federations of these groups.

In virtue of the above principles the Anarchists refuse to be party to the present State organisation and to support it by infusing fresh blood into it.

# Anarchist-Communism (Errico Malatesta)<sup>1</sup>

Those anarchists who call themselves communists (and I am one of them) do so not because they wish to impose their particular way of seeing things on others or because they believe that outside communism there can be no salvation, but because they are convinced, until proved wrong, that the more human beings are joined in brotherhood, and the more closely they co-operate in their efforts for the benefit of all concerned, the greater is the well-being and freedom which each can enjoy. They believe that Man, even if freed from oppression by his fellow men, still remains exposed to the hostile forces of Nature, which he cannot overcome alone, but which, in association with others, can be harnessed and transformed into the means for his own well being. The man who would wish to provide for his material needs by working alone is a slave to his work, as well as not being always sure of producing enough to keep alive. It would be fantastic to think that some anarchists, who call themselves, and indeed are, communists, should desire to live as in a convent, subjected to common rules, uniform meals and clothes, etc.; but it would be equally absurd to think that they should want to do just as they like without taking into account the needs of others or of the right all have to equal freedom. Everybody knows that Kropotkin, for instance, who was one of the most active and eloquent anarchist propagandists of the communist idea was at the same time a staunch defender of the independence of the individual, and passionately desired that everybody should be able to develop and satisfy freely their artistic talents, engage in scientific research, and succeed in establishing a harmonious unity between manual and intellectual activity in order to become human beings in the noblest sense of the word. Furthermore communist-anarchists believe that because of the natural differences in fertility, salubrity and location of the land masses, it would be impossible to ensure equal working conditions for everybody individually and so achieve, if not solidarity, at least, justice. But at the same time they are aware of the immense difficulties in the way of putting into practice that world-wide, free-communism, which they look upon as the ultimate objective of a humanity emancipated and united, without a long period of free development.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Pensiero & Volonta* 1926. Included in *Malatesta Life and Ideas*, Freedom Press.

And for this reason they arrive at conclusions which could be perhaps expressed in the following formula:

The achievement of the greatest measure of individualism is in direct ration to the amount of communism that is possible; that is to say, a maximum of solidarity in order to enjoy a maximum of freedom.

# Selfishness and Benevolence (Donald Rooum)<sup>1</sup>

It is still not thought strange to denounce bosses for pursuing their own selfish advantage, as if to suggest that they would be acceptable, if only they were all incorruptible idealists. It has become obvious that bending the knee to a god and touching the forelock to a boss are mutually reinforcing activities, but it is still not clear to everyone that calling shame on selfishness is another activity of the same kind.

There is a verbal trick, apparently proving that benevolence does not occur. “*Why are you giving a fiver to Oxfam?*” “I think it might relieve someone’s distress.” “*Do you like the thought of relieving someone’s distress?*” “Yes.” “*Then you are not doing it to relieve someone’s distress, but for your own pleasure in relieving someone’s distress.*”

The trick is exposed if we apply the same procedure to an act which is not benevolent. “*Why are you singing in the bath?*” “The reverberations make my voice sound great.” “*Do you like your voice to sound great?*” “Yes.” “*Then you are not doing it to make your voice sound great, but for your own pleasure in making your voice sound great.*”

Obviously there is no distinction between wanting one’s voice to sound great and wanting the pleasure of one’s voice sounding great. Nor is there any distinction between wanting to relieve someone’s distress and wanting the pleasure of relieving someone’s distress. The trick depends on the false assumption that benevolence and selfish pleasure are incompatible.

Awareness of someone else’s emotions causes us to experience a semblance of the same emotions ourselves. This phenomenon is called “empathy”. When the other person’s emotion is painful it is called “primary distress”, and the response it produces is called “empathic distress”.

Empathic distress may be relieved by becoming less aware of the primary distress, for instance by running away or hiding one’s eyes. Or it may be relieved by relieving the primary distress, which is a benevolent act.

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<sup>1</sup> From “Anarchism and Selfishness”, a conscious egoist anarchist article in *The Raven 3* (Freedom Press).

To obtain maximum benevolence from others, maximise their awareness of your distress. The Ethiopian famine of 1984 was a usual type of famine, which at first provoked only a usual type of caring response. Then the first carers managed to get pictures of the suffering on television, and a massive, popular relief effort started. People were more moved to empathic distress by the sight than they had been by the news.

Empathy is not the only motive for benevolence. Species in which the invariable response to empathic distress is to run may care for their mates and young from entirely different urges. In humans, there is also the pride of perceiving oneself to be benevolent. These are all selfish motives, and all produce real benevolence.



# Different Views on Organisation (Errico Malatesta)<sup>1</sup>

There have been anarchists, and there are still some, who while recognising the need to organise today for propaganda and action, are hostile to all organisations which do not have anarchism as their goal or which do not follow anarchist methods of struggle. To these comrades it seemed that all organised forces for an objective less than radically revolutionary, were forces that the revolution was being deprived of. It seems to us instead, and experience has surely already confirmed our view, that their approach would condemn the anarchist movement to a state of perpetual sterility. To make propaganda we must be amongst the people, and it is in the workers associations that workers find their comrades and especially those who are most disposed to understand and accept our ideas. But even when it were possible to do as much propaganda as we wished outside the associations, this could not have a noticeable effect on the working masses. Apart from a small number of individuals more educated and capable of abstract thought and theoretical enthusiasms, the worker cannot arrive at anarchism in one leap. To become a convinced anarchist, and not in name only, he must begin to feel the solidarity that joins him to his comrades, and to learn to co-operate with others in the defence of common interests and that, by struggling against the bosses and against the government which supports them, should realise that bosses and governments are useless parasites and that the workers could manage the domestic economy by their own efforts. And when the worker has understood this, he is an anarchist even if he does not call himself such.

Furthermore, to encourage popular organisations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas, and should therefore be an integral part of our programme.

An authoritarian party, which aims at capturing power to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining an amorphous mass, unable to act for themselves and therefore always easily dominated. And it follows, logically, that it cannot desire more than that much organisation, and of the kind it needs to attain

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<sup>1</sup> From *Malatesta: Life and Ideas* (Freedom Press).

power: Electoral organisations if it hopes to achieve it by legal means; Military organisations if it relies on violent action.

But we anarchists do not want to *emancipate* the people; we want the people to *emancipate themselves*. We do not believe in the good that comes from above and imposed by force; we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance. It matters to us therefore that all interests and opinions should find their expression in a conscious organisation and should influence communal life in proportion to their importance.

We have undertaken the task of struggling against existing social organisation, and of overcoming the obstacles to the advent of a new society in which freedom and well-being would be assured to everybody. To achieve this objective we organise ourselves in a party and seek to become as numerous and strong as possible. But if we were only our party that was organised; if the workers were to remain isolated like so many units unconcerned about each other and only linked by the common chain; if we ourselves besides being organised as anarchists in a party, were not as workers organised with other workers, we could achieve nothing at all, or at most, we might be able to impose ourselves, and then it would not be the triumph of anarchy but our triumph. We could then go on calling ourselves anarchists, but in reality we should simply be rulers, and as impotent as all rulers are where the general good is concerned.

# The Anarchist Revolution (Errico Malatesta)<sup>1</sup>

The Revolution is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies; it is the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life, raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their direct and conscious action, for their own futures. Revolution is the organisation of all public services by those who work in them in their own interest as well as the public's; Revolution is the destruction of all coercive ties; it is the autonomy of groups, of communes, of regions; Revolution is the free federation brought about by a desire for brotherhood, by individual and collective interests, by the needs of production and defence; Revolution is the constitution of innumerable free groupings based on ideas, wishes, and tastes of all kinds that exist among the people; Revolution is the forming and disbanding of thousands of representative, district, communal, regional, national bodies which, without having any legislative power, serve to make known and to coordinate the desires and interests of people near and far and which act through information, advice and example. Revolution is freedom proved in the crucible of facts – and lasts so long as freedom lasts, that is until others, taking advantage of the weariness that overtakes the masses, of the inevitable disappointments that follow exaggerated hopes, of the probable errors and human faults, succeed in constituting a power, which supported by an army of conscripts or mercenaries, lays down the law, arrests the movement at the point it has reached, and then begins the reaction.

The great majority of anarchists, if I am not mistaken, hold the view that anarchy would not be achieved even in a few thousand years, if first one did not create by the revolution, made by a conscious minority, the necessary environment for freedom and well-being. For this reason we want to make the revolution as soon as possible, and to do so we need to take advantage of all positive forces and every favourable situation that arises.

The task of the conscious minority is to use every situation to change the environment in a way that will make possible the education and spiritual elevation

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<sup>1</sup> From *Umanita Nova* 1920–1924 included in *Malatesta: Life and Ideas* (Freedom Press).

of the people, without which there is no real way out. And since the environment today, which obliges the masses to live in misery, is maintained by violence, we advocate and prepare for violence. That is why we are revolutionaries, not because “we are desperate men, thirsting for revenge and filled with hate”.

We are revolutionaries because we believe that only the revolution, the violent revolution, can solve the social question.

We believe furthermore that the revolution is an act of will – the will of individuals and of the masses; that it needs for its success certain objective conditions, but that it does not happen of necessity, inevitably, through the single action of economic and political forces.

I told the jury (at my trial) in Milan that I am a revolutionary not only in the philosophical meaning of the word but also in the popular and insurrectionalist sense; and I said so in order to clearly distinguish between my views and those of others who call themselves revolutionaries, but who interpret the world even astronomically so as not to have to bring in the fact of violence, the insurrection, which must open the way to revolutionary achievements. I declared that I had not sought to provoke revolution because at the time there was no need to provoke it; what was urgently needed instead was to bend all our efforts for the revolution to succeed and not lead to new tyrannies; but I insisted that I would have provoked it if the situation demanded then, just as I would in a similar situation in the future.

# The Origin of Society (Peter Kropotkin)<sup>1</sup>

Most philosophers of the eighteenth century had very elementary ideas on the origin of societies.

According to them, in the beginning Mankind lived in small isolated families, and perpetual warfare between them was the normal state of affairs. But, one fine day, realising at last the disadvantages of their endless struggles, men decided to socialise. A social contract was concluded among the scattered families who willingly submitted themselves to an authority which – need I say – became the starting point as well as the initiator of all progress. And does one need to add, since we have been told as much at school, that our present governments have so far remained in their noble role as the salt of the earth, the pacifiers and civilisers of the human race?

This idea dominated the eighteenth century, a period in which very little was known about the origins of Man, and one must add that in the hands of the Encyclopaedists and of Rousseau, the idea of the “social contract” became a weapon with which to fight the divine rights of kings. Nevertheless, in spite of the services it may have rendered in the past, this theory must be seen to be false.

The fact is that all animals, with the exception of some carnivores and birds of prey, and some species which are becoming extinct, live in societies. In the struggle for life, it is the gregarious species which have an advantage over those that are not. In every animal classification they are at the top of the ladder and there cannot be the slightest doubt that the first human beings with human attributes were already living in societies.

Man did not create society; society existed before Man.

We now also know – and it has been convincingly demonstrated by anthropology – that the point of departure for mankind was not the family but the clan, the tribe. The patriarchal family as we know it, or as it is depicted in Hebrew traditions, did not appear until very much later. Man spent tens of thousands of years in the

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<sup>1</sup> From *The State, its historic role*, written in French in 1896 and intended for delivery as a lecture. English translation now published by Freedom Press. Evidence for Kropotkin’s contention is set out in his *Mutual Aid*, also from Freedom Press.

clan or tribal phase — let us call it the primitive tribe or, if you wish, the savage tribe — and during this time man had already developed a whole series of institutions, habits and customs much earlier than the institutions of the patriarchal family.

In these tribes, the separate family no more existed than it exists among so many other sociable mammals. Any division within the tribe was mainly between generations, and from a far distant age, going right back to the dawn of the human race, limitations had been imposed to prevent sexual relations between the different generations, which however were allowed between those of the same generation. One can still find traces of that period in some contemporary tribes as well as in the language, customs and superstitions of people of a much higher culture.

# The Simplicity of Anarchism (George Nicholson)<sup>1</sup>

The most frightening aspect of anarchism to the regimented mind is the simplicity of the truths it contains. Whilst society is quite prepared to accept the feasibility of planetary flight, alchemy and other things within, and beyond, the realms of logic, the simple possibility of man being self-governing and capable of standing on his own feet — without the aid of political or legal crutches — is regarded as something akin to lunacy, or dangerously fanatical to say the least.

The potential horrors of atomic warfare and the possible obliteration of the human race, although here and there invoking a sundry voice of protestation, is presumably nowhere near as terrifying as the prospect of society being freed from political bondage and given independence to organise its own economy by mutual aid and cooperation.

Government provides its own indictment when it so brazenly presumes the helpless imbecility of its subjects, which it regards as a mass of potential lunatics restrained only by the leash of politics and law. It would seem that without the saving grace of politicians, Bedlam itself would be let loose, and that arson, rape, murder and looting would be the order of the day!

One might be impertinent enough to ask why, then, if people are so incapable of self-restraint they should be deemed sufficiently sane to elect others to control them? Why, for instance, do politicians shout, manoeuvre and contrive to get elected by large majorities if those majorities are such potential lunatics?

The anarchist believes that freedom is what its name implies, and he can't conceive how it is possible to be free and at the same time be governed by others — nor can he see how it is possible to help others to be free by sticking bayonets in their bodies or dropping atom bombs on their homes. He considers himself capable of goodness without religion and of dignity without the aid of law, and whilst he is prepared to give freely and of his best in co-operation with others for the commonweal, he takes exception to administering to the selfishness of drones.

He has no faith in the infallibility of politicians, nor in the wisdom of kings. Whilst he repudiates the necessity of law, he concedes the necessity for order: not

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<sup>1</sup> From the anarchist paper *Freedom*, 1955.

the kind of order decreed by politicians and enforced threats, but natural order resulting from the harmonious development of mutual respect within society, when once freed from political bondage.

There is something radically wrong, he declares, in a system of society that functions and maintains its existence by the impetus of violence and force. He sees nothing praiseworthy in political society which has recourse to periodic wars, or the need of jails, gallows and bludgeons — and it is because he is aware that these brutal weapons are the instruments of every government and State that he works for their destruction.

To him, freedom is something more than mere political clap-trap — it is the quintessence of being and living. It gives focus to the ego's expanding universe, and eclipses the power of ignorance and fear. Given the freedom to assert its inherent qualities, he believes humanity capable of solving its own social problems by the simple application of equity and mutual aid.

Unlike the politician, he does not regard dishonesty, brutality and avariciousness as natural characteristics of human nature, but as the inevitable consequences of coercion and frustration engendered by artificial law, and he believes that these social evils are best eradicated not by greater penalties and further legislation, but by the free development of the latent forces of solidarity and sympathetic understanding which government and law so ruthlessly suppress.

Freedom will be possible when people understand and desire it — for man can only rule where others subserviently obey. Where none obey, none has power to rule.



# **Anarchism and Violence**

# Anarchism and Homicidal Outrage (Charlotte Wilson)<sup>1</sup>

“The propagandists of Anarchist doctrines will be treated with the same severity as the actual perpetrators of outrage” – Telegram from Barcelona, Times, Nov. 10 (1893).

Is the above quoted decision of the Spanish Government a measure for the protection of human life, justified by the peculiar doctrines of Anarchism? Or is it merely one of those senseless and cruel persecutions of new ideas distasteful to the class in power, that may be expected in the ancient home of the Inquisition?

This question must have struck many thoughtful men and women in England, who have heard for the first time of Anarchism as existing in their midst through the recent vituperations of the capitalist press, and certain Conservative members of the House of Commons. And we, the publishing group of the oldest and most widely circulated Communist Anarchist paper in England, wish to meet this question fairly and frankly, and in reply to plainly state our own convictions on the subject.

Human beings have sometimes held beliefs of which murder was the logical and necessary outcome, as, for instance, the Thugs in India, who looked upon the murder of travellers as a religious obligation: is Anarchism such a belief? If it is, then the Spanish people are certainly justified in clearing their country of Anarchists; even though the perpetration of the Barcelona outrage be never directly traced to them; and the English people will be justified in regarding their Anarchist countrymen as enemies, dangerous in proportion as they are energetic and sincere.

We propose to enquire, firstly, if homicidal outrage is the logical outcome of Anarchist principles; secondly, if such outrage is a necessary method in the practical attempt to introduce Anarchism as a principle of conduct, a transforming agency, into existing society; thirdly, we propose to give our view of homicidal outrage as

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Wilson was the main founder and first editor of the anarchist paper *Freedom*. This article (signed “The Freedom Group” though it is certain that she was the author) was published in 1893 in response to a declaration from the Spanish government. In explaining the difference between anarchism and bombthrowing it sets out anarchism clearly, and was therefore issued as a Freedom Pamphlet by Wilson’s successors in 1909.

an actual social phenomenon, the existence of which, whatever be its cause, cannot be disputed.

## **I. Is homicidal outrage the logical outcome of Anarchist convictions?**

The Communist Anarchist looks upon human societies as, essentially, natural groups of individuals, who have grown into association for the sake of mutually aiding one another in self-protection and self-development. Artificially formed Empires, constructed and held together by force, he regards as miserable shams. The societies he recognises are those naturally bound together by real sympathies and common ideas and aims. And in his eyes, the true purpose of every such natural society, whether it be a nation or a federation of nations, a tribe or a village community, is to give to every member of it the largest possible opportunities in life. The object of associating is to increase the opportunities of the individual. One isolated human being is helpless, a hopeless slave to external nature; whereas the limits of what is possible to human beings in free and rational association are as yet unimagined.

Now the Anarchist holds a natural human society good in proportion as it answers what he believes to be its true purpose, and bad in proportion as it departs from that purpose, and instead of enlarging the lives of the individuals composing it crushes and narrows them.

For instance, when in England a comparatively few men claim a right to exclusive possession of the soil, and thereby prevent others from enjoying or using it except upon hard and stinting terms, the Anarchist says that English Society, in so far as it recognises such an arrangement, is bad and fails of its purpose; because such an arrangement instead of enlarging the opportunities for a full human life for everybody, cruelly curtails them for all agricultural workers and many others, and moreover is forced on sufferers against their will, and not arrived at, as all social arrangements ought to be, by mutual agreement.

Such being his view of human societies in general, the Anarchist, of course, endeavours to find out, and make clear to himself and others, the main causes why our own existing society is here and now failing so dismally, in many directions, to fulfil its true function. And he has arrived at the conclusion that these causes of failure are mainly two. First, the unhappy recognition of the authority of man over man as a morally right principle, a thing to be accepted and submitted to, instead of being resisted as essentially evil and wrong. And second, the equally unhappy recognition of the right of property, i.e. the right of individuals, who have

complied with certain legal formalities, to monopolise material things, whether they are using them or need to use them or not, and whether they have produced them or not. To the Anarchist, the state of the public conscience which permits these two principles of authority and property to hold sway in our social life seems to lie at the root of our miserably desocialised condition; and therefore he is at war with all institutions and all habits which are based on these principles or tend to keep them up. He is not the enemy of society, never of society, only of anti-social abuses.

He is not the enemy of any man or set of men, but of every system and way of acting which presses cruelly upon any human being, and takes away from him any of the chances nature may have allowed him of opportunities equal to those of his fellow men.

Such, in general terms, is the mental attitude of the Anarchist towards Society, and beneath this attitude, at the root of these theories and beliefs lies something deeper: a sense of passionate reverence for human personality; that newborn sense — perhaps the profoundest experience which the ages have hitherto revealed to man — which is yet destined to transform human relations and the human soul; that sense which is still formless and inexpressible to most of us, even those whom it most strongly stirs, and to which Walt Whitman has given the most adequate, and yet a most inadequate and partial voice:

*Each of us is inevitable,  
Each of us is limitless — each of us with his or her right upon the earth,  
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,  
Each of us here as divinely as any is here.*

Is this an attitude of heart and mind which must logically lead a man to commit homicidal outrage? With such feelings, with such convictions must we not rather attach a peculiar sanctity to human life? And, in fact, the genuine Anarchist looks with sheer horror upon every destruction, every mutilation of a human being, physical or moral. He loathes wars, executions and imprisonments, the grinding down of the worker's whole nature in a dreary round of toil, the sexual and economic slavery of women, the oppression of children, the crippling and poisoning of human nature by the preventable cruelty and injustice of man to man in every shape and form. Certainly, this frame of mind and homicidal outrage cannot stand in the relation of cause and effect.

## **II. Though Anarchist principles do not in themselves logically lead to the commission of homicidal outrages, do they practically drive the active Anarchist into this course by closing other means of action?**

It is true that his convictions close to the conscientious Anarchist one form of social action, just now unfortunately popular, i.e. parliamentary agitation.

He cannot conscientiously take part in any sort of government, or try to relieve the cruel pressure upon human lives by means of governmental reforms, because one of the worst possible evils he could do his fellow men would, in his eyes, be to strengthen their idea that the rule of man over man is a right and beneficial thing. For, of course, every well meant attempt of the men in power to better things tends to confirm people in the belief that to have men in power is, after all, not a social evil. Whereas the aim of the Anarchist is to convince his fellow men that authority is no essential part of human association, but a disruptive element rather, and one to be eliminated, if we would have social union without unjust and unequal social pressure. The current political means of action and protest, therefore, are barred to the Anarchist, by the new born conception of social relations which is the key note of his creed. On this point he differs from all other Socialists and social reformers.

But is the homicide the necessary antithesis of parliamentary agitation? Must the man who looks upon political action, as commonly understood, as useless and worse, necessarily endeavour to spread his views or improve society by outrages upon his fellow-men?

The question is obviously absurd. If one particular way is barred, an infinite variety of other ways are open. The great changes in the world's history, the great advances in human development have not been either set agoing or accomplished by the authority of kings and rulers, but by the initiative of this man and that in making fresh adaptations to changing material conditions, and by the natural and voluntary association of those who saw, or even blindly felt the necessity for a new departure. And now, as always, the great social change which the most callous feel to be at our doors, is springing from the masses, the inmost depths of the nation in revolt against unendurable misery, and fired with a new hope for better things. We Anarchists have the whole of this vast sphere for our action: the natural and voluntary social life of our countrymen. Not a society founded on principles of voluntary association for any useful purpose whatever, but our place is there. Not a natural human relationship, but it is our work to infuse it with a new spirit. Is not this field wide enough for the zeal of the most fiery propagandist? More particularly in England, at this moment, we find as a field for our endeavours

the vast force of the organised labour movement, a force which, rightly applied, could here and now bring about the economic side of the Social Revolution. Not the parliament, not the government, but the organised workmen of England — that minority of the producers who are already organised — *could*, if they would, and if they knew how, put an end to capitalist exploitation, landlord monopoly, to the starvation of the poor, the hopelessness of the unemployed. They have, what government has not, the power to do this; they lack only the intelligence to grasp the situation, and the resolution to act. In the face of such a state of things as this, has the propagandist of Socialism, who will none of parliamentary elections, no sphere of action left but homicide? Such a question, we say again, is absurd, and we only raise and answer it here because certain Social Democrats have now and again considered it worth asking.

### **III. While homicidal outrages are neither a logical outcome of Anarchist principles nor a practical necessity of Anarchist action, they are a social phenomenon which Anarchists and all Social Revolutionaries must be prepared to face.**

There is a truism that the man in the street seems always to forget, when he is abusing the Anarchists, or whatever party happens to be his *bete noir* for the moment, as the cause of some outrage just perpetrated. This indisputable fact is that homicidal outrages have, from time immemorial, been the reply of goaded and desperate classes, and goaded and desperate individuals, to wrongs from their fellow men which they have felt to be intolerable. Such acts are the violent recoil from violence, whether aggressive or repressive; they are the last desperate struggle of outraged and exasperated human nature for breathing space and life. And their cause lies not in any special conviction, but in the depths of that human nature itself. The whole course of history, political and social, is strewn with evidence of this fact. To go no further, take the three most notorious examples of political parties goaded into outrage during the last thirty years: the Mazzinians in Italy, the Fenians in Ireland, and the Terrorists in Russia. Were these people Anarchists? No. The Mazzinians were Republicans, the Fenians political separatists, the Russians Social Democrats or Constitutionalists. But all were driven by desperate circumstances into this terrible form of revolt. And when we turn from parties to individuals who have acted in like manner, we stand appalled by the number

of human beings goaded and driven by sheer desperation into conduct obviously violently opposed to their social instincts.

Now that Anarchism has become a living force in society, such deeds have been sometimes committed by Anarchists, as well as by others. For no new faith, even the most essentially peaceable and humane the mind of man has as yet accepted, but at its first coming has brought upon earth not peace but a sword; not because of anything violent or anti-social in the doctrine itself; simply because of the ferment any new and creative idea excites in men's minds, whether they accept or reject it. And a conception like Anarchism, which, on the one hand, threatens every vested interest, and, on the other, holds out a vision of a free and noble life to be won by struggle against existing wrongs, is certain to rouse the fiercest opposition, and bring the whole repressive force of ancient evil into violent contact with the tumultuous outburst of a new hope.

Under miserable conditions of life, any vision of the possibility of better things makes the present misery more intolerable, and spurs those who suffer to the most energetic struggles to improve their lot, and if these struggles only immediately result in sharper misery, the outcome is often sheer desperation. In our present society, for instance, an exploited wage-worker, who catches a glimpse of what work and life might and ought to be, finds the toilsome routine, and the squalor of his existence almost intolerable; and even when he has the resolution and courage to continue steadily working his best, and waiting till the new ideas have so permeated society as to pave the way for better times, the mere fact that he has such ideas, and tries to spread them, brings him into difficulties with his employers. How many thousands of Socialists, and above all of Anarchists have lost work, and even the chance of work, solely on the grounds of their opinions. It is only the specially gifted craftsman who, if he be a zealous propagandist, can hope to retain permanent employment. And what happens to a man with his brains working actively with a ferment of new ideas, with a vision before his eyes of a new hope dawning for toiling and agonising men, with the knowledge that his suffering and that of his fellows in misery is caused not by the cruelty of Fate but by the injustice of other human beings, — what happens to such a man when he sees those dear to him starving, when he himself is starved? Some natures in such a plight, and those by no means the least social or the least sensitive, will become violent, and will even feel that their violence is social and not anti-social, that in striking when and how they can, they are striking not for themselves but for human nature, outraged and despoiled in their persons and in those of their fellow sufferers. And are we, who ourselves are not in this horrible predicament, to stand by and coldly condemn these piteous victims of the Furies and the Fates? Are we to decry as miscreants these human beings, who act often with heroic self-devotion, sacrificing their lives in protest where less social and energetic natures would lie down and

grovel in abject submission to injustice and wrong? Are we to join the ignorant and brutal outcry which stigmatises such men as monsters of wickedness, gratuitously running amuck in a harmonious and innocently peaceful society? No! We hate murder with a hatred that may seem absurdly exaggerated to apologists for Matabele massacres, to callous acquiescers in hangings and bombardments, but we decline, in such cases of homicide or attempted homicide as those of which we are treating, to be guilty of the cruel injustice of flinging the whole responsibility of the deed upon the immediate perpetrator. The guilt of these homicides lies upon every man and woman who, intentionally or by cold indifference, helps to keep up social conditions that drive human beings to despair. The man who flings his whole soul into the attempt, at the cost of his own life, to protest against the wrongs of his fellow men, is a saint compared to the active and passive upholders of cruelty and injustice, even if his protest destroy other lives besides his own. Let him who is without sin in society cast the first stone at such an one.

But we say to no man: "GO AND DO THOU LIKEWISE."

The man who in ordinary circumstances and in cold blood would commit such deeds is simply a homicidal maniac; nor do we believe they can be justified upon any mere ground of expediency. Least of all do we think that any human being has a right to egg on another person to such a course of action. We accept the phenomena of homicidal outrage as among the most terrible facts of human experience; we endeavour to look such facts full in the face with the understanding of humane justice; and we believe that we are doing our utmost to put an end to them by spreading Anarchist ideas throughout society.

Suppose a street where the drainage system has got thoroughly out of order, and the foulness of the sewer gas is causing serious illness throughout the neighbourhood. The intelligent inhabitants will first of all seek the cause of the illness, and then, having traced it to the condition of the drainage, will insist upon laying the sewer open, investigating the state of the pipes, and where needful, laying new ones. In this process it is very probable indeed that the illness in the neighbourhood may be temporarily increased by the laying open of the foulness within, and that some of those who do the work may be themselves poisoned, or carry the infection to others. But is that a reason for not opening and repairing the drain? Or would it be fair or rational to say the illness in the neighbourhood was caused by the people who did this work or insisted upon it being done? Yet such is much the attitude of those critics of Anarchism who try to make it appear that we Anarchists are responsible for what is the natural result of the social evils we point out and struggle against.

And how about those Anarchists who use bloodthirsty language? No words can be too strong to denounce the wrongs now inflicted by one human being upon another; but violent language is by no means the same as forcible language, and



very often conveys an impression of weakness rather than of strength. Savage talk is often a sort of relief, which half desperate men give to their tortured nerves; sometimes it is the passionate expression of the frenzy of indignation felt by an enthusiastically social nature at the sight of oppression and suffering; or it may be only the harebrained rattle of a fool seeking a sensation; but whatever its nature, our position with regard to it is well expressed by Mr. Auberon Herbert in his letter to the *Westminster Gazette*, Nov. 22: "Of all the miserable, unprofitable, inglorious wars in the world is the war against words. Let men say just what they like. Let them propose to cut every throat and bum every house — if so they like it. We have nothing to do with a man's words or a man's thoughts, except to put against them better words or better thoughts, and so to win in the great moral and intellectual duel that is always going on, and on which all progress depends."

Every man, Anarchist or not, must speak as he thinks fit, but if an Anarchist cannot resist using the language of bloodthirsty revenge, he would do very well to follow the honest example recently set by the editor of the *Commonweal*, and plainly say, "This is not Anarchism."

# Government and Homicidal Outrage (Marie Louise Berneri)<sup>1</sup>

When the port of Naples is bombed, it is the thickly populated working class district which surrounds the harbour that suffers most. The bombs do not hit the sumptuous villas of rich Fascists which are scattered along the shores of the bay of Naples; they hit those high storeyed houses so crowded one on top of the other that the streets are no more than dark passages between them; houses where people live four or five to a room.

When German cities are bombed it is not the Nazi elite which suffers. They have deep and comfortable shelters just like the elite in this country. Their families have been evacuated to safe districts or to Switzerland. But the workers cannot escape. The city proletariat, the French, Dutch, Belgian and Scandinavian workers are forced by Himmler's factory Gestapo to go on working in spite of heavy bombing. For them escape is impossible.

Workers in British munition factories and aircraft factories are asked to rejoice at this wholesale destruction from which there is no escaping. Photographs, showing great heaps of ruins, are plastered all over the walls with the caption "This is your work". The ruling class wants them to be proud that they have helped to destroy working class families. For that is what they have done. They have helped their masters to stage massacres compared with which the destruction of Guernica, the bombing of Rotterdam and Warsaw look like playing at war. Such posters should outrage humanity, make them feel sick at the role capitalist society calls upon them to play.

The Italian workers have shown that, in spite of twenty years of fascist oppression, they knew better where their class interests lay. They have refused to be willing tools in the hands of the bosses. They have gone on strike, have sabotaged war industry, have cut telephone wires and disorganized transport. What is the answer of Democratic Britain to their struggle against fascism? Bombing and more bombing. The Allies have asked the Italian people to weaken Mussolini's war machine, and we now take advantage of their own weakness to bomb them to bits.

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<sup>1</sup> Part of a 1943 editorial from *War Commentary*, included in *Neither East nor West* (Freedom Press).

Our politicians professed to want revolution in Europe to overthrow fascism. But it is now clearer than ever that what they are most afraid of is that fascism should be overthrown by popular revolt. They are terrified of revolution, terrified of "Anarchy". They want to establish "order", and as always they are prepared to wade through rivers of blood to secure their idea of order — order in which the workers accept their lot of poverty and pain with resignation.

How many times in the past have we heard that Anarchism means bombs, that anarchists work for wholesale destruction. How many times has ruling class police repression been instituted because an anarchist has attempted to assassinate a single ruler or reactionary politician? But one single Hamburgizing raid kills more men and women and children than have been killed in the whole of history, true or invented, of anarchist bombs. The anarchist bombs were aimed at tyrants who were responsible for the misery of millions; ruling class bombs just kill thousands of workers indiscriminately.

"Disorder", "Anarchy", cried the bourgeois Press when single-handed resolute like Sbardelotto, Schirru and Lucetti, tried to kill Mussolini. Now the same capitalists want to rub whole cities off the map of Europe; want to reduce whole populations to starvation, with its resulting scourge of epidemics and disease all over the world. This is the peace and order that they want to bring to the workers of the world with their bombs.

# Anarchism and Violence (Vernon Richards)<sup>1</sup>

Violence, contrary to popular belief, is not part of the anarchist philosophy. It has repeatedly been pointed out by anarchist thinkers that the revolution can neither be won, nor the anarchist society established and maintained, by armed violence. Recourse to violence, then, is an indication of weakness, not of strength, and the revolution with the greatest possibilities of a successful outcome will undoubtedly be the one in which there is no violence, or in which violence is reduced to a minimum, for such a revolution would indicate the near unanimity of the population in the objectives of the revolution.

The use of violence has been justified both as a principle and as a means to an end; hardly ever, however, by anarchists. At the most anarchists have justified its use as a revolutionary necessity, or *tactic*. The misunderstanding is in part the result of confusion in terms for which the anarchists themselves are responsible. We refer, of course, to those who call themselves pacifist-anarchists, and who thereby imply that those not included in these categories must be violent-anarchists! The fallacy, to our minds, is that of making non-violence a principle, when in fact it is no more than a tactic. Furthermore, the “non-violent” advocates fail to make a distinction between violence which is used as a means for imposing the will of a group or class, and that violence which is purely defensive.

There are many ways of changing society. One is by exterminating morally or physically all those who disagree with your way of thinking; the other is by first convincing sufficient people of the rightness of your ideas. Between these two extremes are a number of variations of the first theme but, we submit, there can be no variations on the second. The self-styled “realists” among the libertarians believed that compromise is morally justified since it produces results.

Violence as a means breeds violence; the cult of personalities as a means breeds dictators — big and small — and servile masses; government — even with the collaboration of socialists and anarchists — breeds more government. Surely then, freedom as a means breeds more freedom, possibly even the Free Society!

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<sup>1</sup> From *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution* (Freedom Press).

To those who say this condemns one to political sterility and the Ivory Tower our reply is that “realism” and their “circumstantialism” invariably lead to disaster. We believe there is something more real, more positive and more revolutionary in resisting war than in participating in it; that it is more civilised and more revolutionary to defend the right of a fascist to live than to support the Tribunals which have the legal powers to shoot him; that it is more realistic to talk to the people from the gutter than from government benches; that in the long run it is more rewarding to influence minds by discussion than to mould them by coercion.

Last, but not least, the question is one of human dignity, of self-respect, and of respect for one’s fellows. There are certain things no person can do without ceasing to be human. As anarchists we willingly accept the limitations thus imposed on our actions for, in the words of the old French anarchist Sebastian Faure: “I am aware of the fact that it is not always possible to do what one should do; but I know that there are things that on no account can one ever do”.

# Arguments for Government Answered

# The Idea of Good Government (Errico Malatesta)<sup>1</sup>

None can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is nearest to the truth, or which is the best way to achieve the greatest good for each and everyone. Freedom coupled with experience, is the only way of discovering the truth and what is best; and there can be no freedom if there is a denial of the freedom to err.

But when one talks of freedom politically, and not philosophically, nobody thinks of the metaphysical bogey of abstract man who exists outside the cosmic and social environment and who, like some god, *could do what he wishes* in the absolute sense of the word.

When one talks of freedom one is speaking of a society in which no one could constrain his fellow beings without meeting with vigorous resistance, in which, above all, nobody could seize and use the collective force to impose his own wishes on others and on the very groups which are the source of power.

Man is not perfect, agreed. But this is one reason more, perhaps the strongest reason, for not giving anyone the means to “put the brakes on individual freedom.”

Man is not perfect. But then where will one also find men who are not only good enough to live at peace with others, but also capable of controlling the lives of others in an authoritarian way? And assuming that there were, who would appoint them? Would they impose themselves? But who would protect them from the resistance and the violence of the “criminals”? Or would they be chosen by the “sovereign people”, which is considered too ignorant and too wicked to live in peace, but which suddenly acquires all the necessary good qualities when it is a question of asking it to choose its rulers?

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<sup>1</sup> From *Umanita Nova* 1920. Included in *Malatesta: Life and Ideas* (Freedom Press).

# Power Corrupts the Best (Michael Bakunin)<sup>1</sup>

The State is nothing else but this domination and exploitation regularised and systemised. We shall attempt to demonstrate it by examining the consequence of the government of the masses of the people by a minority, at first as intelligent and as devoted as you like, in an ideal State, founded on a free contract.

Suppose the government to be confined only to the best citizens. At first these citizens are privileged not by right, but by fact. They have been elected by the people because they are the most intelligent, clever, wise, and courageous and devoted. Taken from the mass of the citizens, who are regarded as all equal, they do not yet form a class apart, but a group of men privileged only by nature and for that very reason singled out for election by the people. Their number is necessarily very limited, for in all times and countries the number of men endowed with qualities so remarkable that they automatically command the unanimous respect of a nation is, as experience teaches us, very small. Therefore, under pain of making a bad choice, the people will always be forced to choose its rulers from amongst them.

Here, then, is society divided into two categories, if not yet to say two classes, of which one, composed of the immense majority of the citizens, submits freely to the government of its elected leaders, the other, formed of a small number of privileged natures, recognised and accepted as such by the people, and charged by them to govern them. Dependent on popular election, they are at first distinguished from the mass of the citizens only by the very qualities which recommended them to their choice and are naturally, the most devoted and useful of all. They do not yet assume to themselves any privilege, any particular right, except that of exercising, insofar as the people wish it, the special functions with which they have been charged. For the rest, by their manner of life, by the conditions and means of their existence, they do not separate themselves in any way from all the others, so that a perfect equality continues to reign among all. Can this equality be long maintained? We claim that it cannot and nothing is easier to prove it.

Nothing is more dangerous for man's private morality than the habit of command. The best man, the most intelligent, disinterested, generous, pure, will in-

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1867. From K.J. Kenafik (ed) *Marxism, Freedom, and the State* (Freedom Press).



fallibly and always be spoiled at this trade. Two sentiments inherent in power never fail to produce this demoralisation; they are: contempt for the masses and the over-estimation of one's own merits.

"The masses," a man says to himself, "recognising their incapacity to govern on their own account, have elected me their chief. By that act they have publicly proclaimed their inferiority and my superiority. Among this crowd of men, recognising hardly any equals of myself, I am alone capable of directing public affairs. The people have need of me; they cannot do without my services, while I, on the contrary, can get along all right by myself; they, therefore, must obey me for their own security, and in condescending to command them, I am doing them a good turn."

Is not there something in all that to make a man lose his head and his heart as well, and become mad with pride? It is thus that power and the habit of command become for even the most intelligent and virtuous men, a source of aberration, both intellectual and moral.

# Socialism and Freedom (Rudolf Rucker)<sup>1</sup>

In Russia where the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat has ripened into reality, the aspirations of a particular party for political power have prevented any truly socialistic reorganisation of economic life and have forced the country into the slavery of a grinding state-capitalism. The proletarian dictatorship, which naive souls believe is an inevitable transition stage to real Socialism, has today grown into a frightful despotism and a new imperialism, which lags behind the tyranny of Fascist states in nothing. The assertion that the state must continue to exist until society is no longer divided into hostile classes almost sounds, in the light of all historical experience, like a bad joke.

Every type of political power presupposes some particular form of human slavery, for the maintenance of which it is called into being. Just as outwardly, that is, in relation to other states, the state has to create certain artificial antagonisms in order to justify its existence, so also internally the cleavage of society into castes, ranks and classes is an essential condition of its continuance. The development of the Bolshevik bureaucracy in Russia under the alleged dictatorship of the proletariat — which has never been anything but the dictatorship of a small clique over the proletariat and the whole Russian people — is merely a new instance of an old historical experience which has repeated itself countless times. This new ruling class, which today is rapidly growing into a new aristocracy, is set apart from the great masses of Russian peasants and workers just as clearly as are the privileged castes and classes in other countries from the mass of the people. And this situation becomes still more unbearable when a despotic state denies to the lower classes the right to complain of existing conditions, so that any protest is made at the risk of their lives.

But even a far greater degree of economic equality than that which exists in Russia would be no guarantee against political and social oppression. Economic equality alone is not social liberation. It is precisely this which all the schools of authoritarian Socialism have never understood. In the prison, in the cloister, or in the

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from an article on anarchism first published in 1973. Now published with another essay in *Anarchism and Anarchosyndicalism* (Freedom Press).

barracks one finds a fairly high degree of economic equality, as all the inmates are provided with the same dwelling, the same food, the same uniform, and the same tasks. The ancient Inca state in Peru and the Jesuit state in Paraguay had brought equal economic provision for every inhabitant to a fixed system, but in spite of this the vilest despotism prevailed there, and the human being was merely the automaton of a higher will on whose decisions he had not the slightest influence. It was not without reason that Proudhon saw in a "Socialism" without freedom the worst form of slavery. The urge for social justice can only develop properly and be effective when it grows out of man's sense of freedom and responsibility, and is based upon it. In other words, *Socialism will be free or it will not be at all*. In its recognition of this fact lies the genuine and profound justification of Anarchism.

Anarchism is not patent solution for all human problems, no Utopia of a perfect social order (as it has so often been called), since, on principle, it rejects all absolute schemes and concepts. It does not believe in any absolute truth, or in any definite final goals for human development, but in an unlimited perfectibility of social patterns and human living conditions which are always straining after higher forms of expression, and to which, for this reason, one cannot assign any definite terminus nor set any fixed goal. The greatest evil of any form of power is just that it always tries to force the rich diversity of social life into definite forms and adjust it to particular norms. The stronger its supporters feel themselves, the more completely they succeed in bringing every field of social life into their service, the more crippling is their influence on the operation of all creative cultural forces, the more unwholesomely does it affect the intellectual and social development of power and a dire omen for our times, for it shows with frightful clarity to what a monstrosity Hobbes' *Leviathan* can be developed. It is the perfect triumph of the political machine over mind and body, the rationalization of human thought, feeling and behaviour according to the established rules of the officials and, consequently, the end of all true intellectual culture.

Where the influence of political power on the creative forces in society is reduced to a minimum, there culture thrives the best, for political rulership always strives for uniformity and tends to subject every aspect of social life to its guardianship. And, in this, it finds itself in unescapable contradictions to the creative aspirations of cultural development, which is always on the quest for new forms and fields of social activity, and for which freedom of expression, the many-sidedness and the continual changing of things, are just as vitally necessary as rigid forms, dead rules, and the forcible suppression of ideas are for the conservation of political power. Every successful piece of work stirs the desire for greater perfection and deeper inspiration; each new form becomes the herald of new possibilities of development. But power always tries to keep things as they are, safely anchored to stereotypes. That has been the reason for all revolutions in history. Power operates

only destructively, bent always on forcing every manifestation of social life into the straitjacket of its rules. Its intellectual expression is dead dogma, its physical form brute force. And this unintelligence of its objectives sets its stamp on its representatives also, and renders them often stupid and brutal, even when they were originally endowed with the best talents. One who is constantly striving to force everything into a mechanical order at last becomes a machine himself and loses all human feelings.

It was from this understanding that modern Anarchism was born and draws its moral force. Only freedom can inspire men to great things and bring about intellectual and social transformations. The art of ruling men has never been the art of educating and inspiring them to a new shaping of their lives. Dreary compulsion has at its command only lifeless drill, which smothers any vital initiative at its birth and brings forth only subjects, not free man. Freedom is the very essence of life, the impelling force in all intellectual and social development, the creator of every new outlook in the future of mankind. The liberation of man from economic exploitation and from intellectual, social and political oppression, which finds its highest expression in the philosophy of Anarchism, is the first prerequisite for the revolution of a higher social culture and a new humanity.

# Anarchism, Authoritarian Socialism and Communism (Errico Malatesta)<sup>1</sup>

It is true that anarchists and socialists have always profoundly disagreed in their concepts of historic evolution and the revolutionary crises that this evolution creates, and consequently they have hardly ever been in agreement on the means to adopt, or the opportunities that have existed from time to time to open up the way towards human emancipation.

But this is only an incidental and minor disagreement. There have always been socialists who have been in a hurry just as there are also anarchists who want to advance with leaden feet, and even some who do not believe at all in revolution. The important, fundamental dissension is quite another: socialists are authoritarians, anarchists are libertarians.

Socialists want power, whether by peaceful means or by force is of no consequence to them, and once in office, wish to impose their programme on the people by dictatorial or democratic means. Anarchists instead maintain, that government cannot be other than harmful, and by its nature it defends either an existing privileged class or creates a new one; and instead of aspiring to take the place of the existing government anarchists seek to destroy every organism which empowers some to impose their own ideas and interests on others, for they want to free the way for development towards better forms of human fellowship which will emerge from experience, by everybody being free and having, of course, the economic means to make freedom possible as well as a reality.

It seems unbelievable that even today, after what has happened and is happening in Russia (1921), there are still people who imagine that the differences between socialists and anarchists is only that of wanting revolution slowly or in a hurry.

Social democrats start off from the principle that the State, government, is none other than the political organ of the dominant class. In a capitalistic society, they say, the State necessarily serves the interests of the capitalists and ensures for them the right to exploit the workers; but that in a socialist society, when private property were to be abolished, and with the destruction of economic privilege class dis-

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<sup>1</sup> Various publications 1897–1923. Included in *Malatesta: Life and Ideas* (Freedom Press).

inctions would disappear, then the State would represent everybody and become the impartial organ representing the social interests of all members of society.

Here a difficulty immediately arises. If it be true that Government is necessarily, and always, the instrument of those who possess the means of production, how can this miracle of a socialist government arising in the middle of a capitalist regime with the aim of abolishing capitalism, come about? Will it be as Marx and Blanqui wished by means of a dictatorship imposed by revolutionary means, by a *coup de force*, which by revolution decrees and imposes the confiscation of private property in favour of the state, as representative of the interests of the collectivity? Or will it be, as apparently all Marxists, and most modern Blanquists believe, by means of a socialist majority elected to Parliament by universal suffrage? Will one proceed in one step to the expropriation of the ruling class by the economically subjected class, or will one proceed gradually in obliging property owners and capitalists to allow themselves to be deprived of all their privileges a bit at a time?

All this seems strangely in contradiction with the theory of "historic materialism" which is a fundamental dogma for Marxists.

"Communism is the road that leads in the direction of anarchism." This is the theory of the bolsheviks; the theory of marxists and authoritarian socialists of all schools. All recognise that anarchy is a sublime ideal, that it is the goal towards which mankind is, or should be, moving, but they all want to become the government, to oblige the people to take the right road. Anarchists say instead, that anarchy is the way that leads to communism or elsewhere.

To achieve communism before anarchy, that is before having conquered complete political and economic liberty, would mean (as it has meant in Russia) stabilising the most hateful tyranny, to the point where people long for the bourgeois regime, and to return later (as will happen in Russia) to a capitalistic system as a result of the impossibility of organising social life which is bearable and as a reaction of the spirit of liberty which is not a privilege of the "latin spirit" as the *Communist* foolishly accuses me of saying, but a necessity of the human spirit for action in Russia no less than in Italy.

However much we detest the democratic lie, which in the name of the "people" oppresses the people in the interests of a class, we detest even more, if that is possible, the dictatorship which, in the name of the "proletariat" places all the strength and the very lives of the workers in the hands of the creatures of a so-called communist party, who will perpetuate their power and in the end reconstruct the capitalist system for their own advantage.

When F. Engels, perhaps to counter anarchist criticisms, said that once classes disappear the State as such has no *raison d'être* and transforms itself from a government over men into an administration of things, he was merely playing with words. Whoever has power over things has power over men; whoever governs pro-

duction also governs the producers; who determines consumption is master over the consumer.

This is the question; either things are administered on the basis of free agreement among the interested parties, and this is anarchy; or they are administered according to laws made by administrators and this is government, it is the State, and inevitably it turns out to be tyrannical.

It is not a question of the good intentions or the good will of this or that man, but of the inevitability of the situation, and of the tendencies which man generally develops in given circumstances.

What is the true basis of the differences between anarchists and State communists? We are for freedom, for the widest and the most complete freedom of thought, organisation and action. We are for the freedom of all, and it is therefore obvious, and not necessary to continually say so, that everyone in exercising his right to freedom must respect the equal freedom of everybody else; otherwise there is oppression on one side and the right to resist and to rebel on the other.

But State communists, to an even greater extent than all other authoritarians, are incapable of conceiving freedom and of respecting for all human beings the dignity that they expect, or should expect, from others. If one speaks to them of freedom they immediately accuse one of wanting to respect, or at least tolerate, the freedom to oppress and exploit one's fellow beings. And if you say that you reject violence when it exceeds the limits imposed by the needs of defence, they accuse you of pacifism, without understanding that violence is the whole essence of authoritarianism, just as the repudiation of violence is the whole essence of anarchism.

# Anarchism and Property (Errico Malatesta)<sup>1</sup>

Our opponents, interested defenders of the existing system are in the habit of saying, to justify the right to private property, that it is the condition and guarantee of freedom.

And we agree with them. Are we not always repeating that he who is poor is a slave? Then why are they our opponents?

The reason is clear and is that in fact the property they defend is capitalist property, that is, property which allows some to live by the work of others and which therefore presupposes a class of dispossessed, propertyless people, obliged to sell their labour power to the property-owners for less than its value.

The principle reason for the bad exploitation of nature, and of the miseries of the workers, of the antagonisms and the social struggles, is the *right to property* which confers on the owners of the land, the raw materials and of all the means of production, the possibility to exploit the labour of others and to organise production not for the well-being of all, but in order to guarantee a maximum profit for the owners of property. It is necessary therefore to abolish property.

The principle for which we must fight and on which we cannot compromise, whether we win or lose, is that all should possess the means of production in order to work without subjection to capitalist exploitation. The abolition of individual property, in the literal sense of the word, will come, if it comes, by the force of circumstances, by the demonstrable advantages of communistic management, and by the growing spirit of brotherhood. But what has to be destroyed at once, even with violence if necessary, is *capitalistic property*, that is, the fact that a few control the natural wealth and the instruments of production and can thus oblige others to work for them.

Imposed communism would be the most detestable tyranny that the human mind could conceive. And free and voluntary communism is ironical if one has not the possibility to live in a different regime — collectivist, mutualist, individualist — as one wishes, always on condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Umanita Nova* and *Il Risveglio* 1921–1929. Included in *Malatesta: Life and Ideas* (Free-



Free then is the peasant to cultivate his piece of land, alone if he wishes; free is the shoemaker to remain at his last or the blacksmith in his small forge. It remains to be seen whether not being able to obtain assistance or people to exploit — and he would find none because nobody, having a right to the means of production and being free to work on his own or as an equal with others in the large organisations of production would want to be exploited by a small employer — I was saying, it remains to be seen whether these isolated workers would not find it more convenient to combine with others and voluntarily join one of the existing communities.

The destruction of title deeds would not harm the independent worker whose real title is possession and the work done.

What we are concerned with is the destruction of the titles of the proprietors who exploit the labour of others, expropriating them in fact in order to put the land, houses, factories and all the means of production at the disposal of those who do the work.

It goes without saying that former owners would only have to take part in production in whatever way they can, to be considered equals with all other workers.

Will property (in the revolutionary period) have to be individual or collective? And will the collective holding the undivided goods be the local group, the functional group, the group based on political affinity, the family group — will it comprise all the inhabitants of a nation *en bloc* and eventually all humanity?

What forms will production and exchange assume? Will it be the triumph of *communism* (production in common and the distribution of goods on the basis of the work done by each individual), or *individualism* (to each the individual ownership of the means of production and the enjoyment of the full product of his labour), or other composite forms that individual interest and social instinct, illuminated by experience, will suggest?

Probably every possible form of possession and utilisation of the means of production and always of distribution of produce will be tried out at the same time in one or many regions, and they will combine to be modified in various ways until experience will indicate which form, or forms, is or are, the most suitable. In the meantime, the need for not interrupting production, and the impossibility of suspending consumption of the necessities of life, will make it necessary to take decisions for the continuation of daily life at the same time as expropriation proceeds. One will have to do the best one can, and so long as one prevents the constitution and consolidation of new privilege, there will be time to find the best solutions.

I call myself a communist, because communism, it seems to me, is the ideal to which mankind will aspire as love between men, and an abundance of production,

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dom Press).

will free them from the fear of hunger and will thus destroy the major obstacle to brotherhood between them. But really, even more than the practical forms of organisation which must inevitably be adjusted according to the circumstances, and will always be in a constant state of change, what is important is the spirit which informs those organisations, and the method used to bring them about; what I believe important is that they should be guided by the spirit of justice and the desire of the general good, and that they should always achieve their objectives through freedom and voluntarily. If freedom and a spirit of brotherhood truly exist, all solutions aim at the same objective of emancipation and will end by being reconciled by fusion. If, on the contrary, there is no freedom and the desire for the good of all is lacking, all forms of organisation can result in injustice, exploitation and despotism.

# The Authority of Government (William Godwin)<sup>1</sup>

Authority in the last of the three senses alluded to is where a man, in issuing his precept, does not deliver that which may be neglected with impunity; but his requisition is attended with a sanction, and the violation of it will be followed with a penalty. This is the species of authority which properly connects itself with the idea of government. It is a violation of political justice to confound the authority which depends upon force, with the authority which arises from reverence and esteem; the modification of my conduct which might be due in the case of wild beast, with the modification which is due to superior wisdom. These kinds of authority may happen to vest in the same person; but they are altogether distinct and independent.

To a government, therefore, that talked to us of deference to political authority, and honour to be rendered to our superiors, our answer should be: “It is yours to shackle the body, and restrain our external actions; that is a restraint we understand. Announce your penalties; and we will make our election of submission or suffering. But do not seek to enslave our minds. Exhibit your force in its plainest form, for that is your province; but seek not to inveigle and mislead us. Obedience and external submission is all you are entitled to claim; you can have no right to extort our deference, and command us not to see, and disapprove of, your errors.”

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<sup>1</sup> From *An inquiry concerning political justice* (1793). Included in Peter Marshall (ed) *The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin* (Freedom Press).

# **The Relevance of Anarchism**

# Is Anarchy Possible? (Alexander Berkman)<sup>1</sup>

“It might be possible,” you say, “if we could do without government. But can we?”

Perhaps we can best answer your question by examining your own life.

What role does the government play in your existence? Does it help you live? Does it feed, clothe and shelter you? Do you need it to help you work or play? If you are ill, do you call the physician or the policeman? Can the government give you greater ability than nature endowed you with? Can it save you from sickness, old age, or death?

Consider your daily life and you will find that in reality the government is no factor in it all except when it begins to interfere in your affairs, when it compels you to do certain things or prohibits you from doing others. It forces you, for instance, to pay taxes and support it, whether you want to or not. It makes you don a uniform and join the army. It invades your personal life, orders you about, coerces you, prescribes your behaviour, and generally treats you as it pleases. It tells you even what you must believe and punishes you for thinking and acting otherwise. It directs you what to eat and drink, and imprisons or shoots you for disobeying. It commands you and dominates every step of your life. It treats you as a bad boy, as an *irresponsible* child who needs the strong hand of a guardian, but if you disobey it holds you *responsible*, nevertheless.

Is it not peculiar that most people imagine we could not do without government, when in fact our real life has no connection with it whatever, no need of it, and is only interfered with where law and government step in?

“But security and public order,” you object, “could we have that without law and government? Who will protect us against the criminal?”

The truth is what is called “law and order” is really the worst disorder. What little order and peace we do have is due to the good commonsense of the joint efforts of the people, mostly in spite of the government. Do you need government to tell you not to step in front of a moving automobile? Do you need it to order you not to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge or from the Eiffel Tower?

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<sup>1</sup> From *ABC of Anarchism* (Freedom Press), first published 1927.

Man is a social being; he cannot exist alone; he lives in communities or societies. Mutual need and common interests result in certain arrangements to afford us security and comfort. Such co-working is free, voluntary; it needs no compulsion by any government. You join a sporting club or a singing society because your inclinations lie that way, and you co-operate with the other members without any one coercing you. The man of science, the writer, the artist, and the inventor seek their own kind of inspiration and mutual work. Their impulses and needs are their best urge; the interference of any government or authority can only hinder their efforts.

All through life you will find that the needs and inclinations of people make for association, for mutual protection and help. That is the difference between managing things and governing men; between doing something from free choice and being compelled. It is the difference between liberty and constraint, between anarchism and government, because anarchism means voluntary co-operation instead of forced participation. It means harmony and order in place of interference and disorder.

“But who will protect us against crime and criminals?” you demand. Rather ask yourself whether government really protects us against them. Does not government itself create and uphold conditions which make for crime? Does not the invasion and violence upon which all governments rest cultivate the spirit of intolerance and persecution, of hatred and more violence? Does not crime increase with the growth of poverty and injustice fostered by government? Is not government itself the greatest injustice and crime?

Crime is the result of economic conditions, of social inequality, of wrongs and evils of which government and monopoly are parents. Government and law can only punish the criminal. They neither cure nor prevent crime. The only real cure for crime is to abolish its causes, and this the government can never do because it is there to preserve those very causes. Crime can be eliminated only by doing away with the conditions that create it. Government cannot do it.

Anarchism means to do away with those conditions. Crimes resulting from government, from its oppression and injustice, from inequality and poverty, will disappear under anarchy. These constitute by far the greatest percentage of crime.

The truth is, present life is impractical, complex and confused, and not satisfactory from any point of view. That is why there is so much misery and discontent. The worker is not satisfied; nor is the master happy in his constant anxiety over “bad times” involving loss of property and power. The spectre of fear for tomorrow dogs the steps of poor and rich alike.

Certainly the worker has nothing to lose by a change from government and capitalism to a condition of no government, of anarchy.

The middle classes are almost as uncertain of their existence as the workers. They are dependent upon the goodwill of the manufacturer and wholesaler, of the large combines of industry and capital, and they are always in danger of bankruptcy and ruin.

Even the big capitalist has little to lose by the changing of the present-day system to one of anarchy, for under the latter every one would be assured of his living and comfort; the fear of competition would be eliminated with the abolition of private ownership. Every one would have full and unhindered opportunity to live and enjoy his life to the utmost of his capacity.

Add to this the consciousness of peace and harmony; the feeling that comes with freedom from financial or material worries; the realisation that you are in a friendly world with no envy or business rivalry to disturb your mind; in a world of brothers; in an atmosphere of liberty and general welfare.

It is almost impossible to conceive of the wonderful opportunities which would open up to man in a society of communist anarchism. The scientist could fully devote himself to his beloved pursuits, without being harassed about his daily bread. The inventor would find every facility at his disposal to benefit humanity by his discoveries and inventions. The writer, the poet, the artist — all would rise on the wings of liberty and social harmony to greater heights of attainment.

# Crime in An Anarchy (William Morris)<sup>1</sup>

“Well,” said I, “that is understood, and I agree with it; but how about crimes of violence? would not their occurrence (and you admit that they occur) make criminal law necessary?”

Said he: “In your sense of the word, we have no criminal law either. Let us look at the matter closer, and see whence crimes of violence spring. By far the greater part of these in past days were the result of the laws of private property, which forbade the satisfaction of their natural desires to all but a privileged few, and of the general visible coercion which came of these laws. All *that* cause of violent crime is gone. Again, many violent acts came from the artificial perversion of the sexual passions, which caused over-weening jealousy and the like miseries. Now, when you look carefully into these, you will find that what lay at the bottom of them was mostly the idea (a law-made idea) of the woman being the property of man, whether he were husband, father, brother, or what not. *That* idea has of course vanished with private property, as well as certain follies about the ‘ruin’ of women for following their natural desires in an illegal way which of course was a convention caused by the laws of private property.

“Another cognate cause of crimes of violence was the family tyranny, which was the subject of so many novels and stories of the past, and which once more was the result of private property. Of course that is all ended, since families are held together by no bond of coercion, legal or social, but by mutual liking and affection, and everybody is free to come and go as he or she pleases. Furthermore, our standards of honour and public estimation are very different from the old ones; success in besting our neighbours is a road to renown now closed, let us hope for ever. Each man is free to exercise his special faculty to the utmost, and every one encourages him in so doing. So that we have got rid of the scowling envy, coupled by the poets with hatred, and surely with good reason; heaps of unhappiness

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<sup>1</sup> Morris envisaged the abolition of government by Act of Parliament, and therefore described himself as a socialist and not an anarchist. However, the utopia he imagines in *News from Nowhere* (1890) is undoubtedly an anarchy. In this passage he discusses the question of how anarchy might deal with crime. See Marie Louise Berneri, *Journey through Utopia* (Freedom Press).



and ill-blood were caused by it, which with irritable and passionate men — i.e., energetic and active men — often led to violence.”

I laughed, and said: “So that you now withdraw your admission, and say that there is no violence amongst you?”

“No”, said he, “I withdraw nothing; as I told you, such things will happen. Hot blood will err sometimes. A man may strike another, and the stricken strike back again, and the result be a homicide, to put it at the worst. But what then? Shall we the neighbours make it worse still? Shall we think so poorly of each other as to suppose that the slain man calls on us to revenge him, when we *know* that if he had been maimed, he would, when in cold blood and able to weigh all the circumstances, have forgiven his maimer? Or will the death of the slayer bring the slain man to life again and cure the unhappiness his loss has caused?”

“Yes,” I said, “but consider, must not the safety of society be safeguarded by some punishment?”

“There, neighbour!” said the old man, with some exultation. “You have hit the mark. That *punishment* of which men used to talk so wisely and act so foolishly, what was it but the expression of their fear? And they had need to fear, since *they* — i.e., the rulers of society — were dwelling like an armed band in a hostile country. But we who live amongst our friends need neither fear nor punish. Surely if we, in dread of an occasional rare homicide, an occasional rough blow, were solemnly and legally to commit homicide, we could only be a society of ferocious cowards. Don’t you think so, neighbour?”

“Yes, I do, when I come to think of it from that side,” said I.

“Yet you must understand,” said the old man, “that when any violence is committed, we expect the transgressor to make any atonement possible to him, and he himself expects it. But again, think if the destruction or serious injury of a man momentarily overcome by wrath or folly can be any atonement to the commonwealth? Surely it can only be an additional injury to it.”

Said I: “But suppose the man has a habit of violence, kills a man a year, for instance?”

“Such a thing is unknown,” said he. “In a society where there is no punishment to evade, no law to triumph over, remorse will certainly follow transgression.”

“And lesser outbreaks of violence,” said I, “how do you deal with them? for hitherto we have been talking of great tragedies, I suppose?”

Said Hammond: “If the ill-doer is not sick or mad (in which case he must be restrained till his sickness or madness is cured) it is clear that grief and humiliation must follow the ill-deed; and society in general will make that pretty clear to the ill-doer if he should chance to be dull to it; and again, some kind of atonement will follow, — at the least, an open acknowledgment of the grief and humiliation. Is it

so hard to say, I ask your pardon, neighbour? — Well, sometimes it is hard — and let it be.”

“You think that enough?” said I.

“Yes,” said he, “and moreover it is all that we *can* do. If in addition we torture the man, we turn his grief into anger, and the humiliation he would otherwise feel for *his* wrong-doing is swallowed up by a hope of revenge for *our* wrong-doing to him. He has paid the legal penalty remitted before he said “Go and sin no more.” Let alone that in a society of equals you will not find any one to play the part of torturer or jailer, though many to act as nurse or doctor.”

“So,” said I, “you consider crime a mere spasmodic disease, which requires no body of criminal law to deal with it?”

“Pretty much so,” said he; “and since, as I have told you, we are a healthy people generally, so we are not likely to be much troubled with *this* disease.”

# Small Steps in the Direction of Anarchy (Colin Ward)<sup>1</sup>

As Alexander Herzen put it over a century ago: “A goal which is infinitely remote is not a goal at all, it is a deception. A goal must be closer — at the very least the labourer’s wage or pleasure in the work performed. Each epoch, each generation, each life has had, and has, its own experience, and the end of each generation must be itself.”

The choice between libertarian and authoritarian solutions is not a once-and-for-all cataclysmic struggle, it is a series of running engagements, most of them never concluded, which occur, and have occurred, throughout history. Every human society, except the most totalitarian of utopias or anti-utopias, is a plural society with large areas which are not in conformity with the officially imposed or declared values. An example of this can be seen in the alleged division of the world into capitalist and communist blocks: there are vast areas of capitalist societies which are not governed by capitalist principles, and there are many aspects of the socialist societies which cannot be described as socialist. You might even say that the only thing that makes life livable in the capitalist world is unacknowledged non-capitalist element within it, and the only thing that makes survival possible in the communist world is the unacknowledged capitalist element in it. This is why a controlled market is a left-wing demand in a capitalist economy — along with state control, while a free market is a left-wing demand in a communist society — along with workers’ control. In both cases, the demands are for whittling away power from the centre, whether it is the power of the state or capitalism, or state-capitalism.

So what are the prospects for increasing the anarchist content of the real world? From one point of view the outlook is bleak: centralised power, whether that of governments or super-governments, or of private capitalism or super-capitalism of giant international corporations, has never been greater. The prophecies of nineteenth-century anarchists like Proudhon and Bakunin about the power of the state over the citizen have a relevance today which must have seemed unlikely to their contemporaries.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Anarchy in Action* (Freedom Press).

From another standpoint the outlook is infinitely promising. The very growth of the state and its bureaucracy, the giant corporation and its privileged hierarchy, are exposing their vulnerability to non-co-operation, to sabotage, and to the exploitation of *their* weaknesses by the weak. They are also giving rise to parallel organisations, counter organisations, alternative organisations, which exemplify the anarchist method. Industrial mergers and rationalisation have bred the revival of the demand for workers' control, first as a slogan or a tactic like the work-in, ultimately as a destination. The development of the school and the university as broiler-houses for a place in the occupational pecking-order have given rise to the de-schooling movement and the idea of the anti-university. The use of medicine and psychiatry as agents of conformity has led to the idea of the anti-hospital and the self-help therapeutic group. The failure of Western society to house its citizens has prompted the growth of squatter movements and tenants' co-operatives. The triumph of the supermarket in the United States has begun a mushrooming of food co-operatives. The deliberate pauperisation of those who cannot work has led to the recovery of self-respect through Claimants' Unions.

Community organisations of every conceivable kind, community newspapers, movements for child welfare, communal households have resulted from the new consciousness that local as well as central government exploit the poor and are unresponsive to those who are unable to exert effective pressure for themselves. The "rationalisation" of local administration in Britain into "larger and more effective units" is evoking a response in the demand for neighbourhood councils. A new self-confidence and assertion of their right to exist on their own terms has sprung up among the victims of particular kinds of discrimination — black liberation, women's liberation, homosexual liberation, prisoners' liberation, children's liberation: the list is almost endless and is certainly going to get longer as more and more people become more and more conscious that society is organised in ways which deny them a place in the sun. In the age of mass politics and mass conformity, this is a magnificent reassertion of individual values and of human dignity.

None of these movements is yet a threat to the power structure, and this is scarcely surprising since hardly any of them existed before the late 1960s. None of them fits into the framework of conventional politics. In fact, they don't speak the same language as the political parties. They talk the language of anarchism and they insist on anarchistic principles of organisation, which they have learned not from political theory but from their own experience. They organise in loosely associated groups which are *voluntary, functional, temporary* and *small*. They depend, not on membership cards, votes, a special leadership and a herd of inactive followers but on small, functional groups which ebb and flow, group and regroup, according to the task in hand. They are networks, not pyramids.

At the very time when the “irresistible trends of modern society” seemed to be leading us to a mass society of enslaved consumers they are reminding us of the truth that the irresistible is simply that which is not resisted. Obviously a whole series of partial and incomplete victories, of concessions won from the holders of power, will not lead to an anarchist society. But it will widen the scope of free action and the potentiality for freedom in the society we have.

The idea of one-step, once-for-all revolution has its attractions. But such compromises of anarchist notions would have to be made, such authoritarian bedfellows chosen, for a frontal attack on the power structure, that the anarchist answer to cries for revolutionary unity is likely to be “Whose noose are you inviting me to put round my neck this time?”

# The Relevance of Anarchism (Bill Christopher, Jack Robinson, Philip Sansom, and Peter Turner)<sup>1</sup>

Anarchism is a philosophy of freedom. It is a body of revolutionary ideas which reconciles, as no other revolutionary concept does, the necessity for individual freedom with the demands of society. It is a commune-ist philosophy which starts from the individual and works upwards, instead of starting from the State and working downwards. Social structure in an anarchist society would be carefully and consciously kept to a minimum and would be strictly functional; where organisation is necessary, it would be maintained, but there would be no organisation for its own sake. This would help to prevent the hardening of organisations into institutions – the hard core of government.

The heart of anarchism is its opposition to government. Not just a particular Government, but government as an institution. This is explicitly expressed in the word “anarchism” meaning the philosophy or ideology which aims at “anarchy”: the absence of government. The aim is shared by other ideologies – socialist and communist – who see the “withering away of the State” as a desirable goal, but conceive the way towards that goal as lying through the use of the very institutions they want to abolish. Anarchists maintain that the use of these repressive institutions in the name of the revolution, or of progress, or of freedom, corrupts the revolution, inhibits progress and crushes freedom.

For anarchists, the end determines the means. If your end is a society without government, then you do not do anything to support the idea or fact of government or to encourage the idea that government can in any way be desirable. If your aim is the abolition of the State – which is the concentration of the institutions of government – then you do nothing to encourage the life of the State by pretending it can be used for liberation: All the means by which people are governed are anathema to anarchism.

This adds up to a coherent and logical ideology and within itself anarchism is a perfect set of ideas. In its application to the existing “real” world, however, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Written and published by the editors of *Freedom* in 1970. Included in Charles Crute (ed) *The*

being applied to very imperfect situations. And furthermore, anarchists themselves differ in their interpretations of anarchism, both in relation to current events and in the emphasis they put upon the various aspects of the overall philosophy.

This can lead to apparent contradictions. Anarcho-syndicalists who advocate the abolition of the wage system support workers on strike for higher wages; individualists who are opposed to the State see no reason why they should not avail themselves of the social services when they are unemployed; anti-parliamentarians support the abolition of a law (hanging, abortion, homosexuality) which can only be done through Parliament; anti-imperialists condemn “national liberation” movements which are fighting an imperialist oppressor; anti-war militants who have gone to prison rather than take up arms support a violent revolution ... and so on.

This is not quite so absurd as it may appear. We have to live in the world as it is – but as anarchists we are going to do our damndest to make it as we would like it to be. We know how beautiful life could be, but we have to start from the ugly reality.

Now each anarchist will make his own moves and if we respect each other we will respect our comrade’s own scale of priorities. Thus, for example, the anarcho-syndicalist will be concerned primarily with achieving workers’ control of industry, and this necessitates building up workers’ confidence in their own powers. Every victory in even a minor struggle encourages this confidence; every defeat diminishes it. So the anarchist in an industrial context will throw in his effort to help win a dispute which perhaps in itself is irrelevant as far as a money-less society is concerned, but which will teach the workers more about tactics, about the value of direct action, about their importance in society, the strength they gain through solidarity, the creativity of their work, their dignity as human beings – perhaps a hundred lessons.

For we should not forget that there are two sets of aspects of anarchism: the end and the means. We have implied the end: anarchy, the society without government or any of the means of government, without money and the wage system and the exploitation they bring; without the State which defends that exploitation through the law, the police, the prisons, the constitutional murder of the gallows or the gas chamber, all backed up by the army, navy and air force; the inculcation which passes for education, the subtle pressures of the bureaucracy and the Church. Anarchy means the replacement of these anti-social forces by free association and mutual aid, by free access to the means of life, by the joy of making and sharing and living. A delightful ideal!

Anarchism also means the struggle to achieve all this. A bitter struggle against ruthless forces which will apparently stop at nothing to maintain the power set-

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*State is Your Enemy* (Freedom Press).

up as it is. The great advantage anarchism has is that it is not side-tracked into diversions like the parliamentary struggle, like “workers’ government” or the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, trying to achieve power in order to abolish it or the historical process or any other mythology. Anarchism teaches the governed to use their strength where it matters — at the point of production; and to use it in the way it matters — by direct action.

The means of freedom for the end of freedom: that is the relevance and strength of anarchism.



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Donald Rooum and Freedom Press (ed.)  
What Is Anarchism? An Introduction  
1995

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