

# **Aspects of Anarchism**

**Thoughts and commentary on some of the most important issues that anarchists must confront, from an anarchist communist perspective**

Anarchist Federation

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# ANARCHIST COMMUNISM

ANARCHIST COMMUNISM is a distinct body of revolutionary social and political ideas. It offers a radical alternative to the statist belief systems which have proved their bankruptcy in the twentieth century.

Marxism, in both its Bolshevik and social democratic varieties, has proved a disastrous failure. Socialism, and the other ideologies based upon capitalism such as fascism and liberal democracy have proved overtly murderous or hypocritically so. Only anarchist communism remains to be tested as a fully coherent approach to organising the world. As the second millennium passed, its last century saw the almost unrestrained rise of the State and with it virtually continuous warfare - plunder dressed up as the "global economy" and ecological devastation. The people of the world today deserve much more than has been available to the great majority so far.

The rise of capitalism, the technological state and imperialism are eliminating the human factor from social life. The individual in the advanced industrialised state is removed from the community and isolated in concrete boxes, with television as the main link to the world outside. The poor majority in Africa, Latin America and Asia struggle to survive as their way of life is increasingly dictated by the needs of an insatiable global economy, with their own elites encouraging and benefiting from this exploitation. Racism and nationalism are if anything stronger, stirred up by various elements in the ruling class and taken up by many people in the working class as they see can see no other answer to their problems. Women are under attack world-wide with the rise of religious fundamentalism and the generalised obsession with the "decline of the family" and "moral values".

Anarchist communism is the alternative. It places the individual at the centre of its approach, for only active, thinking persons can ever be free. However, the individual does not exist apart from the rest of humanity. Capitalist exploitation whilst destroying "natural" communities has created and is creating social solidarity on the basis of class identity and reality, where people choose to identify with each other rather than being forced into a community because of tradition. The ruling classes of the world are waging a desperate class war against numerically-vast populations of workers and peasants. In the search for profits the producing classes are subject to ever-more savage assaults. But it is out of this struggle between exploiter and exploited, between the oppressors and the oppressed, that the mass of the population will achieve human freedom. Social revolution is the only way of achieving this liberation.

## A Utopian Dream

Anarchist communism is often attacked as being a utopian dream since it is both anti-capitalist and anti-state. The argument goes that both of these are necessary because of "human nature". Won't new forms of exploitation and new classes arise? Isn't it inevitable that some people have more power than others? Isn't the state necessary to keep order? We say a loud "no!" to these arguments. Within the general context of a stateless and moneyless society, the new society

will create communities and other social relations which will be expressions of individual and social desires. There is no antagonism here between the individual and the collective for two reasons. Firstly, the individual belongs to and survives within the context of the collective, so the affinity groups, co-operatives, industrial and neighbourhood councils which will act as the social means of organising and acting in society will simply be extensions of the individual within society. Secondly, all systems and groups established to get things done will have built into them a number of devices preventing the abuse of power. They will be assemblies of those people directly involved, affected by or with an interest in whatever is being done or proposed and should any form of delegation be necessary then the delegates will be directly elected, easily-removable and temporary.

Also, given the development of communications technology, mass participation, either within a popular assembly or via linkups of local groups and individuals, will be possible. Society will depend of full access to and communication of information. The assemblies at the local, district or regional levels will be able to plan for the future on the basis of input from participation at various stages of the peoples' assemblies. We've used a territorial example here but the principle could apply to all forms of co-operation and work-in-solidarity, no matter where it happens. Given that there will be no coercive state apparatus to enforce decisions made within the various popular organisations, there will be no physical imposing of undesirable options. The aim throughout will be to achieve results on the basis of consensus and compromise.

Anarchist communist society will be a moneyless society. Goods and services will be made available on the basis of need with society as a whole determining priorities for production and levels of consumption. People will need to think about and plan this but the horror stories of 'feeding frenzies' or people stockpiling goods are sheer fantasies. There is a limit to the number of things that people can consume, possessiveness will become an aberration not the norm, there will be no 'wealth' to accumulate, no advertising to over-stimulate demand and education about the benefits of sharing, solidarity and co-operation; all will naturally limit demand and allow production and consumption to be balanced. One of the functions of money is to act as a "store of value". This allows individuals in capitalist societies to accumulate enormous sums well in excess of what they can ever spend. In a moneyless society there is no mean accumulating wealth, thus creating another obstacle to the re-emergence of a ruling class.

It may be objected that this basis of social organisation is fine for local village-sized populations but is unworkable on a large scale. However, there is no reason why it could not operate on a larger scale if it is based on the principles of voluntary co-operation and federation, which would still allow for freedom and solidarity. Even within capitalism huge organisations and corporations are often little more than conglomerations of small groups organised within a given managerial structure. Local small-scale efforts are channeled in a particular direction. There is no reason those efforts could not be organised voluntarily for the common and individual good with the initiative coming from below.

For an anarchist communist society to operate effectively, education in the widest sense must prioritise a socialisation stressing personal growth, a love of freedom together with a sense of responsibility, and solidarity. Capitalist education has effectively gained an acceptance amongst most of the population of a system that exploits them through a subtle process of brainwashing and a distortion of the natural tendency towards social solidarity by stressing patriotism, nationalism or loyalty to the company. An anarchist communist approach to education would allow the natural tendencies to develop so that individuals would be able effectively to participate in

the new society with confidence and the mutual respect that comes from a desire to associate and co-operate.

Most other ideologies aim to dominate and control nature and indeed the last centuries have witnessed a total transformation of the natural world as it has been twisted and distorted to fit the supposed needs of human beings. Now nature is giving its reply, to such an extent that the very existence of humanity is threatened. Anarchist communism seeks to work in harm with natural forces, utilising appropriate levels of technology to meet people's needs. There are enough resources on the planet to provide a living for all, without destroying the planet in the process.

Anarchist communism is the only ideology which challenges all exploitation and oppression, whether it be of workers by bosses, women by men or the environment by human beings. It alone emphasises both freedom of the individual and solidarity within the community and struggles for a society which is free of both economic exploitation and the oppressive state. Anarchist communism alone can point the way forward to survival and well-being.

# FREEDOM

IN THE NAME OF FREEDOM, the USA has invaded or dominated dozens of countries and regions including Vietnam, Grenada, Nicaragua and El Salvador. In the defence of freedom, Britain imposes martial law on Northern Ireland. Freedom for Hitler meant exterminating Jews, for Stalin it required the invasion of Eastern Europe. Everyone today seems to want freedom. But freedom for capitalist states, corporations and parties surely cannot be the same as freedom for anti-capitalists. As these examples show, there appears to be no one acceptable definition of 'freedom'. Has freedom any real value, except as a propaganda weapon to justify self-interest?

## Definitions

Anarchists take it for granted that freedom is vital to humanity. Yet others fear freedom, preferring security to the responsibilities that freedom gives. Under capitalism most citizens see freedom as the ability to consume the latest video recorder or music machine - is freedom really about acquiring consumer goods? One of the oldest ideas about freedom is that it means being left alone to get on with life without interference. Now this is all very well in a general sense, no-one likes to be constrained or hindered. But within the context of class societies, this demand serves as camouflage to justify inequality. So-called 'negative freedom' (the absence of constraining laws) much loved by libertarian and capitalist parties is supposed to benefit everyone. In practice this freedom is the freedom of the rich to plunder the poor, of freedom for businessmen to exploit their workforce, for advertisers to humiliate women and so on. Such freedoms to exploit and mistreat are often protected by laws passed by the powerful to protect their privileges. Where there are gross inequalities of power, freedom only maintains inequality at the expense of the great mass of the population.

Socialists, and particularly the Marxist variety, are more likely to view freedom in class terms. Now whilst classes exist, it is clear that freedom is a fiction. But have Marxists in power done any better than the capitalists? Without exception they have been severely repressive. Using the rhetoric of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", the party tries to exert total control over the proletariat (the workers). Marxism is an ideology of intellectuals with special "scientific" insights (so they claim). When given power such intellectuals use their insights to decide the kinds of 'freedom' people will enjoy. Marxist-Leninist states are without exception class divided societies with severe codes of labour discipline, extensive political police networks and political repression. All Marxist-Leninist states are prison states in which freedom only exists for the ruling class. This is not ancient history – the heirs of these parties and governments are still around today, seeking the chance to take power. One of the strengths of anarchist communism is that it has not developed a sterile formula for freedom. Freedom is seen as a rich and vital element applicable to all areas of human activity. From an anarchist communist perspective, freedom exists in both individual and social terms – there is an intimate interrelationship between the two.



## Coercion

Anarchists argue that wherever there are coercive or bureaucratic institutions freedom will be affected. In human relationships, the hierarchical family is usually a patriarchal and adult-dominated institution. So called democratic organisations that institutionalise power and authority become oligarchic, either openly through the degeneration of internal structures or covertly via informal leaderships. On a grander scale, the state curtails freedom (to benefit the ruling class) by means of the legal, bureaucratic and military systems it maintains. In contemporary society there is a working alliance between all types of coercive institutions to maintain order, from the family upwards. Freedom involves the destruction of externally imposed order (and, perhaps, internally imposed self-discipline when this denies human development). To achieve freedom, government from without must be replaced by voluntary co-operation within society. Anarchists envisaged a society in which individual freedom is maximised whilst preserving the freedom of others. Anarchists argue that individuals should act as they feel fit, so long as they do not interfere to an intolerable degree with the freedom of others. Put differently, freedom has limits, the limit being arrived at when others are exploited, dominated or in some other way harmed.

Since humans are naturally social animals, for freedom to accord with our nature, it must be in a societal context. In respect to social freedoms anarchist communists see them as being integrated within community. Freedom is unimaginable outside of community. In contemporary society, community, in the sense of meaningful social solidarity, has been largely destroyed class domination. One of the key tasks of post-capitalist society will be to recreate community to promote personal and social development. There may arise, however, contradictions between individual and societal goals which anarchist communists argue can to a large degree be overcome through a system of federation. Individuals, local and larger groups of people agree to act in unison so long as it is advantageous. From the individual's point of view, the advantages of voluntarily joining with others are those of communal living e.g. friendships sexual relationships, support, availability of goods and services. So long as the individual gains more from participating in society it will be advantageous. When the disadvantages become intolerable, the individual has the option of 'dropping out'. From the community's point of view, it has the "right" to defend its collective freedom from individual saboteurs and can seek recourse in expulsion of the anti-social individual. Given that the vast majority of us will want the benefits social life and society bring, it is important we begin to work out and act out the balance between the individual and community, in both thought and action.

Freedom in the real world of capitalism and the state is an illusion. In an anarchist communist society, with its social equality and solidarity, it at last becomes possible

# CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

THE AIM OF ANARCHISM is to obtain a free and equal society. For anarchists now the biggest problem is how to achieve the transformation from the present capitalist world to an anarchist one. Anarchists are a tiny minority throughout the globe but we believe that an anarchist society will be to the benefit of all humanity. Since we think that anarchism is objectively in the interest of all, many people question the emphasis on class struggle to achieve a revolution. Here we will try to explain the Anarchist Communist analysis of class and the need for class consciousness amongst the working class if anarchist ideas are to triumph.

Much confusion is caused by the concept of class. This is not the place to examine the myriad economic, sociological and psychological definitions, all of which have important insights to offer in the analysis of present society. Instead we will concentrate on the Anarchist Communist political definition which holds that the working class for, want of a better term, includes the vast majority of the world's population who are oppressed and exploited by a tiny minority of rulers, the Boss Class, who order them about and live off the produce of their labour. These are not precise terms and it is not to label individuals as belonging to one class or the other, nor should it be. Class is a collective entity and can only exist in the context of a social whole. We identify the working class as the prime agent in changing society because of its numerical and productive collective strength and the obvious fact that those poorer and more oppressed have more to gain and less to lose in overthrowing capitalism and are therefore more likely to do so. However to gain that result what we describe as the working class must recognise themselves for what they are and how they stand in relation to the bosses. As Marx correctly said, only the class, conscious of itself, can achieve the revolution.

## Consciousness And The Individual

For anarchists the implication of this is that the revolution cannot be carried out on behalf of the working class by an "enlightened" minority acting in its name. This does not imply, as many well meaning anarchist "educationalists" proclaim, that the vast majority of individuals must become convinced of anarchist politics before we can act to implement anarchism. Class consciousness is not a product of individual commitment but an ideological transformation effecting every aspect of social interaction. It will be reached not when everyone can quote Bakunin and Malatesta ad infinitum but when the working class recognises itself as such and libertarian forms of organisation are seen as both possible and the natural way to run our lives. To bring this sense of class consciousness into being, anarchists must simultaneously work to break down the ideological domination of capitalist ideas, and struggle as part of our class against capitalism in practice. The first of these we do by spreading anarchist ideas and by exposing the false values of liberalism, democracy, labourism etc for what they are, excuses to justify the rule and privilege of a small elite. Anarchism in turn gains from this by learning from the experience of the working class from which all anarchist theory ultimately derives- the concept of anarchists advocating

workers councils is a good example of this. Participation in the class struggle comes naturally to anarchists as we are not only struggling against our own oppression but recognise that as one aspect of a whole oppressive system which generates solidarity with others in the same position. This natural desire to fight back has the added good of showing the rest of our class what anarchism is really about rather than the lies and myths spread by the media. These two strands of anarchist activity are entwined as better ideas make us more effective in action and involvement in struggle leads to better ideas.

It is important to realise that continuous anarchist activity will not lead inexorably to the growth of class consciousness. Capitalism is continually reinventing itself to ensure its own survival. Not only does it rubbish libertarian communist ideas and reinforce its own ideological stance through the education system, the media etc but it always aims to co-opt movements of resistance into its own system. The trade unions, Marxist-Leninist parties, even the Labour Party all started out to challenge capitalism, even if only in a tame way, and all have ended up as part of its structure or an alternative form of capitalism. The class consciousness we wish to create must be such that it not only stands opposed to the present system but must be capable of controlling those who will use the class struggle to achieve power for themselves. To this end an emerging Class Consciousness must manifest itself as more than a vague feeling amongst our class but express itself in organisation on libertarian principles not least in a coherent and united anarchist movement. The ideas and practice of the Anarchist Federation are one step on this road.

# ORGANISATION

WHAT IS 'ORGANISATION'? It's a vast subject so let's think about one kind of organisation relevant to anarchists. This is the 'Revolutionary Organisation'. Each kind of organisation has its own purpose enabling people to accomplish what they cannot individually, harnessing energy and resources in productive ways. However organisations are not pure rational constructs. They have their own culture, often obscured by formal structures. Strip away the theoretical organisation of states, corporations and political parties and you reveal the hierarchy, authority, fear and greed that is true organisation in a capitalist society. Because of this some anarchists reject not only the 'ordering' imposed on our minds by capitalist society but all forms of organisation. We in the Anarchist Federation recognise the problems of organisation but accept that it is necessary both in and in achieving a libertarian society. What is important is to make organisations that reflect the ideas of anarchist communism in their own practice.

## **Determination and Solidarity**

To create effective organisations we must know our own and other's minds, therefore there must be a high degree of communication, of sharing. We must set about creating aspiration, setting achievable targets, celebrating success, rededicating ourselves again and again to the reasons why we have formed or participate in the organisation. And because organisation is a mutual, sharing activity these things cannot be contained within one mind or merely thought but acted out and given a tangible existence through words and actions. At the same time, we must remain individuals, capable of independent and objective appraisal, not cogs in some vast machine.

What then is the purpose of 'revolutionary organisation'? Can it be described? Given that the need for revolution already exists, revolutionary organisation must increase the demand for revolution. It must increase the measurable 'weight' or 'force' of the resources joined to demand revolution. The structure must increase the ability of the organisation to perpetuate itself while its ends remain un-realised. It must increase the ability of the organisation to resist attack, by increasing the determination and solidarity of members and by so arranging itself that damage caused to it (from external attacks, defections, internal conflicts and so on) are minimised. It must be flexible, be able to absorb or deflect change or challenges to it, have the ability to change or cease as circumstances dictate and the self-knowledge to initiate change when change is required. High levels of positive communication, mutual respect and celebration, shared aspirations and solidarity all describe the revolutionary organisation.

## **Creating a Revolutionary Structure**

Anarchists in a free society will be self-ordering and society will be self-regulating. The organisations we construct will arise out of the needs of the moment, filtered by our knowledge

and perceptions. Organisations, whether free associations, collectives, federations, communes or 'families' will be fluid and flexible but retain the ability to persist. They will be responsive to individual and social need. They will have a structure and culture matching the needs, beliefs and purpose of members. They will not have the super-ordered, monolithic or divergent cultures of competition, fragmentation, subordination or conflict that exist within organisations today. Creating organisations that have a revolutionary structure is an act of revolution itself. The more we do it, successfully, the better we will be at making the revolution and the closer we will be to achieving revolution. But to be successful we have to learn far more about the nature of organisations, what is effective communication and how we respond to demands for change.

The Anarchist Federation is one attempt to put these ideas into a practical form. We do not claim to have all the answers, but we are convinced that anarchist communism can only hope to make real progress as the leading idea in a united revolutionary movement. Working as an organisation has made our interventions in the class struggle stronger and our ideas clearer than they could be alone or in local groups, and though we still have a long and hard road to travel, ever increasing co-ordination is unmistakably the way forward. A powerful revolutionary organisation will not come about by people simply agreeing with each other. Only through the dynamics of working together can we achieve the unity of activity and theory necessary to bring about a free and equal society.

“Anarchism is organisation, organisation and more organisation”, Malatesta

# SOLIDARITY

THE IDEA THAT THE INDIVIDUAL is of supreme importance is only a relatively recent development in historical terms. For most of human history, belonging to a group took precedence as people identified with the tribe, the clan, the family and locality. Social solidarity was what counted and acts committed by individuals were perceived to be the responsibility of the wider social groupings to which they belonged. Blood feuds, for example, which involved warring extended families, often arose from the action of a single individual but carried collective responsibility. Unlike modern capitalism, which tends to isolate individuals, pre-capitalist systems tended to incorporate them. People were bound together through a variety of social ties. This social solidarity was once a normal and universal form of relationship, though not the only one people shared.

## Natural

Insofar as individuals find it extremely difficult to live in total isolation, it is surely possible to agree that social solidarity is natural. Human beings are social animals who find it beneficial to co-operate and necessary to associate with each other. Even within modern industrial societies, the urge to belong to some community or other seems overwhelming. In the fight against exploitation and oppression within the capitalist system, people have always recognized the need for solidarity in order to win even basic demands. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, striking workers and those undertaking social struggles such as rent strikes or campaigns for better housing or sanitation understood the power of standing together and tried to create and maintain the greatest degree of unity in order to beat those who opposed them. The tension between capitalism's self-serving individualism and the need for united action by the working class has been one of the main preoccupations of workers in struggle. The rights of the individual (to act within the law as they think fit no matter what the cost) has been consistently proclaimed by employers and governments precisely to break the strength of the organised working class. When if you did not work, you starved, the 'scab labourer' who took your job while you were on strike was the most hated person in working class communities. How much easier to encourage people to 'scab' when the right to work and to act in one's own best interests is championed by government ministers and enforced by police truncheons. The best kind of solidarity is, of course, of all people with all other people. Anarchist communists have always struggled to create this kind of solidarity no matter what artificial difference is maintained to divide us. Because we work for working class unity we oppose those unions who pit one worker against another (for instance white collar vs manuals, unskilled vs craftsmen, employed vs unemployed). Trade unions act as a barrier to wider solidarity since their main concern is a particular craft, occupation or industry. Sectionalism, meaning a divided workforce, has always been a feature of trade unionism in Britain, a fact maintained by union bosses and welcomed by employers.

## Powerful

Solidarity on a mass scale can be tremendously powerful. During the General Strike of 1926, sympathy and support for the locked-out miners was so great that there was no strike-breaking at all from within the working class – the ruling class had to do essential jobs themselves, policemen, soldiers and college students driving trams and moving coal! Such solidarity was extremely powerful, so powerful that the union bosses feared it might escape their control. Though terrifying the government as the months of strike went by, it was the union leaders who called off the strike when the legitimacy of a government that would not meet the worker's just demands began to be questioned. Without a government, the cozy lives of the union leaders would disappear; they would rather millions suffered lower wages and worse conditions than surrender their privileges to the solidarity of working class people. The failure to achieve solidarity of purpose and action usually has dire consequences. During the 1984 Miner's Strike, internal dissension within the union's ranks and lack of significant support outside seriously weakened the struggle to preserve the mining industry, hundreds of thousands of jobs and hundreds of coalfield communities. If solidarity is important for struggles which are of a defensive and limited nature within capitalism, then it is clear that in order to overthrow the system, the widest and most determined unity is going to be essential. Failure to involve the great mass of working class people and at least neutralize most others will lead either to quick defeat or civil war. The greater the cohesion and solidarity of people and their struggle, the easier will be the task of creating post-revolutionary anarchism, the free society.

## The Individual In Society

An anarchist society by definition requires the absence of government. Anarchists also seek an end to *all* coercive institutions and relationships. What replaces them, and allows millions of people to live and work in relative harmony without laws, governments and police? Part of the answer must lie in the creation of networks of social groups which meet the needs of individuals and with strong bonds within them and between the groups. We must be a society of individuals and of social groups.

While the danger exists that social pressures will narrow the area of personal freedom, these will be countered by libertarian education and socialization, the creation of a desire, a hunger if you like, for personal expression and fulfillment amongst all people. We will also need to create social structures and dynamics which promote the greatest possible degree of personal autonomy. Anarchist communists believe that social solidarity is simply the most 'natural' form of living in the world. Anarchy will not be an amalgamation of unconnected, isolated individuals, but a dynamic solidarity in which people interact on the basis of freedom and equality.

# RIGHTS

RIGHTS constantly crop up in our lives. Almost all debate and choice about what we can or cannot do is coloured by talk about different rights. Natural Rights, Human Rights, Children's Rights, Animal Rights, the Right to Life, The Right to Die, the Right to Know, the Right to Privacy and endless others. All are appeals for people to get what they deserve and what they are entitled to. Collectively rights amount to a universal fairness, which, if only they were all respected, would leave no one with cause for complaint. All that is needed for any disputes in society to be resolved is for conflicting rights to be weighed against one another and the most equitable solution found. It will not surprise our readers that we think this view is utter rubbish and we tend to agree with the philosopher Jeremy Bentham who said that natural rights were a "nonsense upon stilts". This article takes a very brief look at rights, critiques what's wrong with them and sets out what anarchists can use as an alternative in political dialogue. Obviously we are not going to say that changing the theoretical framework of political discussion can bring revolutionary change in itself. However we do say there is an interchange between ideas and practice which grow from one another. Rejecting campaigns for our 'rights' enables us to see beyond immediate goals inside the confines of present society just as actual struggles have shown us the need to go beyond what the bosses can concede in terms of rights.

## **Are Rights Right On?**

The question of rights became a major political influence with the American and French Revolutions and has since expanded to almost all aspects of human interaction. One distinction worth making is between positive and negative rights. The latter are rights which allow individuals freedom from interference from the state. These rights, mostly advocated by ideological liberals, were in general the first to be put forward e.g. the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in the American constitution. Positive rights have come later, pushed for by state socialists and Keynesian capitalists. They differ in requiring action by others or the state to ensure their fulfillment. An example is the right to work. To 'enjoy' this right someone must provide a job for you to do. The distinction between these two types of rights is by no means clear cut and they are united by the justification for their existence. All these claims of rights rest on being part of a natural order with which human society should conform, hence the term 'natural rights'.

## **What's Wrong With Rights?**

Logically there are gaping holes in the theory of rights. Firstly there is no evidence that rights exist as part of a supposed natural order. Even if they did, to move from what actually is to what ought to be is not necessarily so (naturalistic fallacy if you want to know G.E Moore about it). For example it is natural for people to die of disease but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to cure



the sick. Secondly, rights accruing to certain groups have problems of demarcation. Do human rights extend to fetuses? Do animal rights extend to non-vertebrates? However to anarchists these are minor quibbles. Our objection to rights rests on their political content. Rights are only of use if they can be enforced. To which we must ask — who decides what rights there are and who will make sure they are put into effect? This cannot be simply side-stepped by more ‘democratic’ or anarchist forms of decision making. The idea of rights presupposes that there is a correct answer to be discovered and that makes it an issue for experts. Anarchists do not believe that there are factual answers to how people interact. It effects everyone in a community and everyone should participate in the decision making process. No one is greater expert on you than yourself. Of course if you want to build a house you would be foolish not to consult people with expertise in architecture or bricklaying but they have no greater knowledge than anyone else in the community as to whether a house needs to be built. These types of decision can be blurred on occasion but with rights we can see a definite difference. Rights are the product of a hierarchical society. If you are in dispute with someone over a clash of rights you must appeal to a higher authority. When decisions go against people in British courts they go to the European Court of Human Rights. Regardless of whether they win or lose they have surrendered control of their own lives to someone else. We are not saying that the idea of rights is a manipulative con by capitalism to divert rebellion into acceptable channels but it is a product of capitalist, individualistic and authoritarian thinking which cannot serve as the basis for a society of freedom and equality.

## **Right On!**

What can be done about this? Obviously we shouldn’t give up what practical rights the bosses have conceded to us in the present. In fact they should get a hearty kicking for even thinking about taking away our rights to pensions, striking, free abortion etc. Unfortunately they’ve already done most of that if we ever had it anyway. We need somehow to gain power for ourselves that they can’t take away. Without speculating overmuch on a future anarchist society we can see some key features of it emerging through the struggles of our own class in the here and now. One of these is the kind of arguments we use in settling points of controversy between us. Anarchism rejects opinions that rely for their justification on what is ‘naturally’ the case or on someone’s judgment simply because of who they are. Instead we aim at a leadership of ideas that convince people because of their own merits. Real decisions about people’s lives cannot be resolved fruitfully by recourse to abstract categories, however benign they may appear. To place our faith in rights is to abdicate responsibility for our own decisions and surrender to a tyranny subtler but more all embracing than the cosh.

# COLLECTIVE ACTION

CONTRARY TO POPULAR PREJUDICE, fostered by both media caricatures and by the antics of a small number of self-proclaimed ‘anarchists’, anarchism is neither ‘rugged individualism’ nor individualistic rebellion. Whilst anarchists argue that the realization of individual freedom is central to any authentically revolutionary politics, we don’t equate this fundamental freedom with the right of individuals to manifest their ego without regard for social totality. More importantly, it is our belief that it is *collective* action which creates change and is essential to anarchism rather than the activity of isolated and atomized individuals.

## The Fallacy Of Individualism

This is such common sense that it should not require comment but so often individualism is regarded as the bedrock of anarchism rather than its actual opposite. That is not to say, of course, that social anarchists, especially anarchist communists, are opposed to individuality – far from it – but that in capitalist society individualism is at best an excuse by some to selfishly indulge themselves and at worst an ideology which encourages the most horrendous competitiveness and exploitation. Capitalism loves (and sings the highest praises of) individualism while crushing real individuality. Capitalism fears, however, collective action. A trade union’s strength is founded upon the potential of its members to take for collective action. The union’s ability to mobilize and control this action is crucial to its credibility and position as a mediating influence between worker and boss. If the possibility of collective action is removed, trade unions tend not to be taken seriously by either employers or members any more.

The individual can be compared to the finger of a hand. On its own it is not particularly strong or effective but in unison with the other fingers it can become a fist. The working class, in whatever context whether community or workplace, is more easily dominated and exploited when it is divided and, because divided, powerless. When it organises itself collectively, it has the potential to act in a concerted manner against capital. The workplace provides opportunities for individual action such as sabotage, absenteeism and ‘theft’ but these activities, even when organised clandestinely, can be more effective when done collectively. Individual actions may alter relations and conditions within a class but not between classes or permanently. And it is far more likely that the actions of the ruling class in manipulating social relations to its advantage will bring about change far more easily than the efforts of one or more individuals. If not mutuality, what then? As Malatesta says, *My freedom is the freedom of all*.

Collective action also creates a spirit of combativeness as people realize that, far from being powerless, they do have the power to bring about change. The most outstanding example in recent years was the anti-Poll Tax movement. If resistance to that tax had been purely in terms of individual non-payment, of individuals separated from others refusing to pay, rather than in the form of a community of collective struggle, then it would have rapidly collapsed as isolated individuals were picked off by the State.

## Mutual Aid

Mutual aid as a basis for human society and all forms of social relationships and organization is vastly superior as an organizing principle than competition or regulated interaction (contract). Kropotkin showed conclusively that mutual aid was the rule amongst the most successful species (of all kinds, including predatory ones and humankind): “Those species.... which know best how to combine have the greatest chance of survival and of further evolution”. Success for the individual is always bought at the expense of the group and is both destructive and energy-consuming. At the same time ‘species that live solitarily or in small families are relatively few, and their numbers limited’ – and the energy required for them to live at any other than a rudimentary level is great. A simpler life for some means less life for others. The social relation that activates and extends mutuality in time and space is *solidarity*. It is what changes the natural impulse to co-operate and to share into a force governments fear. It is the means by which the potential new social relations acquire the strength to change society and which enable relations and institutions based on mutual aid to retain their strength.

The individual anarchist can only do so much on her/his own. The feeling of isolation which capitalism imposes on the individual rebel can often lead to disillusionment and despair. Collective action in the shape of an anarchist group can accomplish far more whilst a national network constantly keeping militants informed and motivated..... well, who knows what we could achieve? Why not take the *individual* decision to take *collective* action with the Anarchist Federation?

# DIRECT ACTION

ONE OF THE CENTRAL THEMES OF ANARCHISM is that people should have the freedom and the means to take full control of their lives. Anarchists have developed an individual and collective approach to human emancipation. This has come to be called direct action and takes many forms. Anarchists believe that there is a strong correlation between means and ends and this means freedom is not something that can be granted to us by politicians. We have to act for ourselves if we want a better world.

The belief in self-emancipation arises from a deep distrust of politicians, statesmen, bureaucrats and others who would claim the right and expertise to run society. Anarchists are cynical of such people whether they are on the right or left of the political spectrum. The absurd socialist position which advocates for example, capturing posts within the state system, inevitably ends up with people being at best imprisoned by the system, or more likely with them being transformed by the system itself. Parliament has tamed every fiery MP that has remained for any prolonged period of time within its walls. Direct action essentially means taking control of our own lives and action to create a better world without the mediation of political parties and other organisations that would act on our behalf. As anarchists have pointed out for generations, even the most well-intentioned of leaders and organisations become corrupted by power. The sociologist Robert Michels went so far as to speak of an “iron law of oligarchy” which he argued, overcomes the most democratic of representative organisations. The only realistic way to bring about a better world is to do it ourselves. Anarchists then reject authoritarian, bureaucratic and representative institutions as being opposed to our interests.

## Goals

Direct action though, has a more positive character. It enables the oppressed and exploited to gain self-realisation of their value and helps bring about self-empowerment. Setting and achieving goals actually increases the awareness and self-confidence of those in struggle; it is a liberating process in itself. The oppressed, when they engage in struggle, develop and discover qualities that they never dreamed they possessed. And since the struggle is under the control of those directly involved rather than under outside agents, like full time union officials, it also develops skills of organisation and propaganda. A recent clear example of this is to be found in the thousands of local anti-poll tax groups which sprang up around the country in the 1980s. Starting from scratch, ordinary people created effective local direct action groups which dealt a fatal blow to the Poll Tax. Even when struggles end in defeat, they can indicate what methods and tactics should not be used in the future. However, it is the traditional organisations of the working class which are most likely to fail. For example, the trade unions which are run by tired and cynical hacks invariably hold back and limit the struggle. The characterisation of the National Union of Mineworkers as ‘lions led by donkeys’ is not far from the truth for that and other trade unions. One of the beauties of doing-it-yourself is that it is an extremely flexible approach which can be

used effectively on an individual, group, or mass level. The isolated anarchist, for example, can and should spread the anarchist message, whether by leaflets, stickers, local newssheet, posters etc. It would be wrong, however to fetishise the individual act. On the collective level people can organise much more effectively, having larger resources and numbers to be able to act on a wider scale. Mass strikes, occupations, riots and other militant forms of revolt are dramatic examples of what is possible given the imagination, motivation and militancy of workers in struggle. Less obvious acts include working to rule, go slows, and sabotage.

A form of direct action which has caused some controversy in the ranks of anarchism is “propaganda by the deed”, as distinct from (for instance) consciousness-raising or “propaganda by the word”. This has involved political assassinations, bombings, etc and was acclaimed by late nineteenth century anarchists, including, for a brief period, Kropotkin. Usually such acts were carried out by individuals or small groups who were isolated from the mass movement. Assassinations of kings and politicians may have been dramatic but were universally counter-productive in that they provided the state with counter-revolutionary propaganda weapon and an excuse for repression. Sometimes, direct action takes forms which herald new revolutionary forms of organisation, embryonic examples of post-revolutionary society within the present one. When workers occupy and control factories, they are demonstrating their claim and power over them. The factory committees which sprang up in Russia in 1917 before the Bolshevik counter revolution showed that workers had the ability and inclination to take over production.

## **Experiment**

In many uprisings, the masses themselves have taken over the task of maintaining order in the face of counter-revolutionary sabotage and terror. In fact the whole process of revolution is like one huge school of self-emancipation and experiment. There have been in the twentieth century dramatic examples of working class, people rejecting their own forms of political organisation in favour of more direct forms of self-organisation, such as political assemblies. The soviets of Russia in 1905 and 1917 and Hungary in 1956 immediately come to mind. However, and this is crucial, action in itself is not enough. There has to be a political awareness and consciousness if self-organisation is not to be subverted by the authoritarians. The soviets in 1917 became intoxicated by the radical sounding propaganda of the Bolsheviks and transformed into willing tools of their enemies, the state socialists. A similar development took place in Germany a year later, though this time it was the right-wing Social Democratic Party that side-tracked the revolution.

Despite these and other difficulties there is still no doubt that only direct action by the oppressed can lead to liberation. Freedom has to be taken - and by us in each and every aspect of our lives.

# HUMAN NATURE

THE QUESTION OF HUMAN NATURE is a fundamental starting point of any political and social philosophy. The major historic political philosophers such as Hobbes and Rousseau had very definite views on the subject, that shaped the nature of their proposed ideal societies. Generally speaking, political standpoints which have a 'pessimistic' view of human nature are on the right of capitalism. 'Pessimism' in this context means that human beings (or at least the masses) are seen as morally weak, corruptible, greedy and in need of leaders. Societies based on this view must be organised on a hierarchical basis, with the weak masses being controlled by an enlightened or otherwise superior elite or ruling class. Fascism and conservatism share the view that leadership, a strong state to enforce that leadership and economic inequalities are natural, even necessary, being merely a reflection of the reality of human nature.

## Propaganda

It has to be admitted that, in society on these islands and indeed in many others, many working people accept this pessimistic viewpoint. Decades of propaganda from schools and the media have been swallowed whole and an acceptance of inequalities and the impossibility of an egalitarian society are generally accepted. Human nature, we are assured, makes a just and equal society an impossible utopian dream. Anarchist communism as a political doctrine involves an 'optimistic' view of human nature, whilst taking a very critical (some would say cynical) view of the realities of present-day social and political organizations within the capitalist system. We obviously reject the pessimism of the Right, which we are convinced is nothing more than a crude justification for exploiting most of humankind. How can such an optimistic view of human nature be justified on the part of anarchist communists?

Firstly we look to anthropology to show that human societies have been and are often organised on communistic lines. Harold Barclay's *People Without Government* and Pierre Clastre's *Society Against The State* contain numerous examples of people living without classes or the State perfectly happily. Archaeology tells us that that the State and economic classes emerged in a number of places (Mesopotamia, Egypt etc) only about 5000 years ago (compared with 100,000 of human pre-history before then) – the rest of the world coped without the State for a lot longer than it has been around. The reasons why the State and classes did emerge are controversial issues but the truth is that humans lived in classless societies for tens of thousands of years. If human nature was always selfish, greedy, individualistic and mean (as so many right-wing philosophers with a vested interest tell us), such societies could never have existed, never mind surviving for millennia.

## Impossible?

Our critics say it is impossible to ‘prove’ the anarchist communist case that people are basically co-operative and social in their approach to life. After all, there are daily examples of individuals acting in uncaring and selfish ways. Our reply to this is that the development of hierarchy, social classes, the State and capitalism have all taken their toll and have distorted our fundamental human natures. Human beings, unlike all other living creatures, have the capacity to act consciously against their natures and are highly flexible in their response to ‘abnormal’ social conditions which typify everyday life. What is remarkable is that given the fundamentally anti-human nature of capitalism, so many people still retain any sense of co-operativeness, solidarity and a caring approach to life. People need security in their everyday lives within the context of community solidarity and cohesion. In pre-war Germany, conditions were so bad that millions of people voted for the illusory sense of security that Fascism offered (and joined the Nazi Party out of a desire to be safe, to belong to something), rather than the chaotic bourgeois democracy of the Weimar Republic. For an interesting discussion of this, read Erich Fromm’s *Fear of Freedom*. Today, the desperate need for security and community induces people to join all sorts of religious cults, to merge themselves wholly in the dance scene, to seek communal expression for their fears, whether paedophile witch-hunters or Muslim youth gangs. The rise of alternative religions in the West and other phenomena is directly attributable to the anti-human nature of capitalism.

Along with the basic needs of community and security (both economic and psychological), humans must have a significant degree of personal autonomy or, if you like, freedom, if they are to develop according to their natures. Capitalist societies offer the illusion of freedom (to consume) whilst enslaving millions in factories, shops, offices and the home. The political and legal systems fix the limits of freedom ever more narrowly, distorting and deforming in all sorts of ways the daily lives of working people. Exploitation and domination by capitalism has created an army of confused and lost people, unable to relate with others on a meaningful level or only within the culture and language of their ‘tribe’.

## Conformity

Children are moulded to conform to a sexual division of expression and behaviour, which prepares them for a later division of labour on gender lines. Boys are cajoled into playing active, aggressive and masculine roles. Their natural responses must be suppressed – “big boys don’t cry” – and they are conditioned to deny themselves. Girls are brought up to be passive and dependent, with the ultimate aim of motherhood as the way to achieve completeness as a person. Even roles such as ‘New Man’ and ‘lad-ette’ are manufactured to create the illusion of freedom but instead create only a compulsion to behave (to consume) in a particular way. Socialisation of this sort begins at birth and carries on relentlessly throughout childhood and pre-adult life. Even supposedly fundamental concepts such as ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are not natural, but are taught and must be learned through a long and often painful process. No wonder so many people are fucked up, given that the process is imposed on all, regardless of who they actually are.

Only anarchism, and particularly anarchist communism, allows the full development of human beings which is as much dependent on interactions of all kinds with other humans as it does

on the individual will we ourselves may exercise. It alone bases its approach on the proven need of humans for both collective security through community (on the one hand) and personal autonomy (on the other) via solidarity and sociability. Place these within the context of a non-exploitative and classless society, the necessary *pre-condition* for protecting and nurturing human nature, and you have anarchist communism. Though human nature is necessarily very complex, only in an anarchist communist society of the future (but which is being built today) can human nature be given its full expression and revealed in all its fullness. Creativity, love, belonging and freedom are mutilated in today's society; packaged and sold where a profit can be made, damaged and destroyed where they can't. In the society of the future, these qualities of essential human nature will be set free.



# AGAINST EXPLOITATION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLASS SOCIETIES, which in ancient times replaced egalitarian societies throughout the world, were disastrous for the great mass of humanity. Although there were often gains, in terms of increased productivity through improved communications etc, society became divided into haves and have-nots. Class societies are based on exploitation – the process by which the many provide for the greater well-being of the few. The ‘invention’ of private property and the explosion of capitalism as the dominant economic system in the last few hundred years brought the process of exploitation to near perfection. Exploitation under capitalism primarily means that workers are robbed by their employers of the full value of their labour. If the boss wants profit, and money to package, advertise and develop the product, he can only get it by stealing a greater and greater share of its market value from the person who produced it. There is an irony here since, of course, the bosses hate pilfering by workers. Grand larceny by one is okay, it seems, petty theft by the other is not. Only a portion of the wealth that workers create actually goes to them and sometimes a very small proportion indeed! The rest goes to the capitalist as profit, leading over time and depending on the level of exploitation, to the creation of huge personal and corporate wealth. Even quite small employers frequently leave millions in their wills.

## Marx

Karl Marx, despite anarchist criticism of his failure to analyse the dangers of state power, powerfully explained some of the ways exploitation occurs. Wealth, he pointed out, comes about when the raw materials provided by nature (wood, cotton coal and so on) are transformed by labour using technology (tools, scientific processes, machinery etc). Before capitalism, the production of goods was a series of transactions between independent producers. The woodsman sold timber, the carpenter shaped it, the merchant transported it, the retailer sold it. Each sold what he or she owned for what it was worth to them or what the market offered, freely and by their own decision. Wealth stolen and accumulated during centuries of feudalism (dependent on the exploitation of bonded labourers), allowed proto-capitalists to take control of these transactions away from the people themselves, turning them into waged labourers entirely dependent on the owner. The forests were enclosed and became the property of the nobles, who sold rights to their timber to the new merchants and industrialists. Carpenters could only get wood if they agreed to sell the finished articles to the industrialist who then controlled the price to the retailer. As more and more parts of the process fell into the hands of a single person, the capitalist, more and more of the profit available at each stage of transaction began to be accumulated in a single place, giving the owners even more power, for they could now demand lower prices for commodities and higher prices for finished goods, buying the parts of government they needed – the army, local militias, magistrates, law-makers and so on – to protect their wealth and accelerate the process.

Of course, what is supposed to regulate this process is the market and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the interventions of social democratic governments. In good times, when the market is booming and prices high, the owning classes make great profit. Presumably these entrepreneurs, the great risk-takers who build political and commercial empires, take a loss when economies contract and prices fall? Not a bit of it! Because they own everything, and are protected by government, they find it easier to reduce their costs by laying-off their workforce, sacking people. The workers become an economic liability in times of recession and the labour power of the worker, the power that creates all wealth, merely one more commodity that can only be sold for what the market for labour, again controlled by the owning classes, is prepared to pay.

So the workers are robbed day in and day out. What they own is bought for less than it is worth. What they produce is taken from them for less than they could sell it for. What they must buy to live is sold to them at more than it cost to produce. Unfortunately, most workers ie us, are unaware of this. Many workers accept the principle of ‘a fair day’s work, for a fair day’s pay’, little realizing that the ‘game’ is unfair from the start. Because most of us contribute only a small part to the finished article, this exploitation is largely invisible. We think managers simply manage, control a process of production, are just like us, when in fact they are scheming day in and day out to increase productivity or push down costs – to make profit. A bad boss will make us angry and sometimes create a sense of injustice, for instance when even profitable factories are closed, but rarely do we feel consciously exploited.

## **Exploiting Ourselves**

The workers, by and large, accept the capitalist economic approach of seeing themselves as one of the costs of production, rather than the main source of society’s wealth. In doing so, they unwittingly accept the basic premise of the capitalist system. There are many reasons why workers unthinkingly accept their exploitation. In part it is due to the persuasive power of education and the mass media but also it is a result of trade unionism.

Trade unions accept capitalism. Their role is not to help bring about its destruction but to operate within it. In doing so they help promote capitalist exploitation. The unions try to improve wages and conditions but to do so they must accept the bosses’ right to manage and to go on exploiting people. If workers, through their trade unions, ever manage to reclaim too high a proportion of the wealth they create, the bosses simply close the factory as ‘unprofitable’. The process of collective bargaining between workers and management is a recognition of the legitimacy of the system. In other words, the best that unions can offer is a ‘fairer’ (!) system of exploitation.

By dividing workers on the basis of what they do, by skill, industry and class, trade unions also aid the process of exploitation by dividing workers one from another. A divided working class is a weakened one. Where employers feel they have extra scope to extend the level of exploitation, they will do so. For example, young workers, women and recent immigrants are easily exploited due to a whole range of cultural factors that make them vulnerable, and suffer as a result. Despite so-called protective legislation, the rise of feminism and ‘girl power’, women still earn a lot less than men, even when the work is of a similar nature.

Unlike many Marxists who view the process of exploitation in supposedly ‘scientific’ terms, anarchist communists have no truck with such ‘objectivity’. Capitalism is a system which is

morally unjust, corrupting, degrading and highly destructive of environments, people and societies. The wages system, which is the basic mechanism of exploitation, must be swept away as part of the movement to destroy capitalism. As Kropotkin pointed out, all of the wealth of the world which has been produced over the centuries is the result of the efforts of all humanity. This wealth must be restored to all of the people of the world – it belongs to no-one and everyone.

# WORK

*It has become an article of the creed of modern morality that all labour is good in itself- a convenient belief to those who live on the wealth of others* William Morris, *Useful Work vs Useless Toil* 1885

LET'S FACE IT, work as we know and loathe it today, sucks. Anybody who has worked for a wage or a salary will confirm that. Work, for the vast majority of us, is basically forced labour. And it feels like it too! Whether you're working on a casual or temporary basis and suffer all the insecurities that entails or are 'lucky' enough to have a permanent position where the job security tightens like a noose around your neck, it's pretty much the same. Work offers it all: physical and nervous exhaustion, illness and, more often than not, mind-numbing boredom. Not to mention the feeling of being shafted for the benefit of someone else's profit. Think about it. Work eats up our lives. Not just the time we're physically engaged in it either. Apart from the hours we're paid for, work dominates every facet of our existence. When we're not at the job we're traveling to or from it, preparing or recovering from it, trying to forget about it or attempting to escape from it in what is laughably called our 'leisure' time.

Indeed work, a truly offensive four-letter word, is almost too horrifying to contemplate. The fact is that those of us 'in work' sacrifice the best part of our waking lives to work in order to survive in order to work..... This scary aspect of reality is so frightening that work itself becomes a kind of drug, numbing us, clouding our minds, with the wage packet the ultimate reward. Think about it too much and even the 'cushiest' of jobs becomes pretty unbearable. Apart from the basic fact that if you don't work (sell your labour power) and would rather not accept the pittance of state benefits you don't eat, wage slaves are dragooned into 'gainful employment' by ideologies designed to persuade of the personal and social necessity of 'having a job'. This can be described as the 'Ideology of Work'. What we need to ask is, where did these ideologies come from and how did they manage to get such a hold on us?

## Slaves Of Many Kinds

Ancient Greek civilization, that model for modern democracies, did not consider physical labour to have any intrinsic value other than it's immediate benefit to the individual and community. That an ideology of work did not develop in Greek society was due to the simple fact that most labour was provided by a captive population, its slaves, conscripted and coerced at will. The abject powerlessness and dependence of the slaves upon their masters meant that there was minimal need to convince them of their toil's worth or value. This was also true of the many forms of bonded servitude that existed throughout the ancient world. We have little record of what the slaves themselves thought about the work they were compelled to do, although the slave-gadiator Spartacus would later give Roman slaveholders something to think about!

An identifiable ideology of work began to take shape with the decline of slavery and the emergence of feudalism. The Catholic Church has, throughout its history, been uniquely part of the political apparatus of the ruling class and has always served its interests. The many medieval

peasant uprisings and heretical movements based on the poverty of Christ threatened both State and Church alike, proclaiming an earthly heaven where the power of the nobles to enforce work through taxation would be ended by sharing out the wealth of both amongst the poor. Additionally, people began to control their working lives more, demanding higher wages and organizing in independent craft guilds. In response, the idea of work as a spiritual and noble activity began to be preached from the pulpits, divinely ordained. Those who worked began to be accorded a new status within the overall divine hierarchy with nobles and priests at the top, sturdy yeomen in the middle and humble villein below. Those free spirits or broken men who resisted domestication, 'sturdy beggars' and 'scroungers' were vilified by the ruling classes who passed draconian laws against so-called vagrancy and vagabondage. Individuals who had not been integrated into the economy were portrayed as lazy and ungodly outlaws and forced into what would eventually become the embryonic working class.

Calvinist theology maintains that only a pre-selected few, the Elect, will see heaven. The proof of one's saintly nature and assured heavenly reward was believed to be earthly success so Calvinism developed a strong work ethic. Calvinists dedicated themselves to working hard and accumulating wealth, mute witness to their divine manifest destiny. This single-minded, methodical and disciplined ideology was highly useful to the emerging capitalist classes who were, in many countries, the religious classes as well. It also provided a theory of society that ensured the successful transformation of medieval society's bonded labourers (serfs) into (theoretically) free men – the wage slaves of the future who have to sell their labour – without too much risk that they might turn their backs on the whole sordid mess. As a result capitalism fundamentally changed the nature of work.

The protestant work ethic, as it came to be known, was reinforced as industrial capitalism consolidated its grip on society (though not without considerable and violent working class resistance). It's virtually impossible now to realize that virtually everything produced by society (except those requiring collective effort like mining, brewing or baking) was owned by those who produced it, who were able to control the value of their labour through the price they were prepared to sell it for. The 'success' of the factory system meant that capitalism had a means to create vast numbers of jobs but at the price of surrendering this power and wit it, freedom itself. But for decades it could never meet its need for labour, hence the wholesale enslavement, sorry recruitment, of tens of thousands of women and children into factory and mine. New laws were passed which restricted the ability of people to work on a temporary or casual basis. Existence itself (without means of visible support) became a crime as the industrial masters sought to discipline an essentially free peasantry and artisan class into docile factory armies. To the stick of social stigma, the workhouse and prison for those who refused to work, the bosses added the carrot of permanent employment for the loyal and humble worker, wage differentials for skilled and semi-skilled labour, a mythic social prestige for the 'kings of labour' (miners, steelworkers and the like). A 'job for life' became a commonly-held and achieved aim maintained in periods of healthy capitalism but withheld when recession or the need to restructure capitalism arrived. In even recent times, children were able to leave school at fourteen and be with the same employer, often doing the same job until retirement. The work ethic was reinforced by encouraging workers' self-identification with their work. Even today, the first question following an introduction remains "What do you do?" Miner's villages, working men's clubs, factory leagues, trades unions, the occupational pension – aspects of society that divided workers one from another as much as they defined them. This job identification was reinforced by craft, and later trade, unionism

which encouraged skilled workers to regard themselves as a special case and to practice mutual aid and solidarity only within their own trade or even grade of work within the trade.

## **The Ideology Of Work**

All of this was happening as wage labour was becoming generalized and assisted in its legitimization in the eyes of the new working class and in society as a whole. Unemployment became a moral not social problem, whilst those without work became 'victims', 'unfortunates' by progressives and pariahs by everyone else. This ideology dominated despite the efforts of socialists to get across the basic fact of life that unemployment was created by capitalism, and no-one else. Large numbers of people continue to blame themselves for their unemployed state, for their poverty and lack of any human worth, an attitude the state sees no reason to change. It keeps people from demanding work when none is available but does not prevent them being coerced back into the labour force when they are once again needed.

This ideology of work has begun to be challenged by recent changes in capitalism itself, by chronic mass unemployment and under-employment, the phenomenon of temporary and casual work, short-term contracts and flexibility. The notion of a job for life, so widespread in the boom period of post-war capitalism, has become a thing of the past for most working people outside the so-called professions. The apprenticeships which created skilled manual workers for manufacturing industries are almost non-existent. Work is transitory, fragmented and periods of unemployment regarded as a natural condition. Many young working class people have never experienced the 'dignity' which labour is supposed to bestow and those who have never known the 'world of work' feel little guilt in not being part of it. At the same time it is obvious that work as a basis for capitalism's desired smooth social integration of the working class is being undermined both by chronic global economic crises, which is requiring rapid and radical restructuring, and by new technologies which are increasingly making certain classes of workers redundant.

So where does this leave libertarian revolutionaries and our vision of social change? Will our arguments for a society without 'employment' ie without bosses and wage labour, make more sense to working class people for whom work has already become a despicable means to an end, and for whom work has little meaning. Is there the possibility that a weakening of workers' identification with their 'occupation' will engender a weakening of their identification with the status quo? Or perhaps the atomization of large sections of the working class by the continuing process of capitalism's development bring a further dissipation of class consciousness?

Whatever the consequences of the decline of the work ethic and ideology, one thing is for certain and that is that wage labour will remain an alienated and alienating experience for those who are forced to take part in it at whatever level, and that the exploitation inherent in work under capitalism will not go away. The emancipation from work is the task of the workers alone!

# LEADERS

MOST PEOPLE on the left would argue that ‘democracy’ is infinitely preferable to fascism and many working class people dies in what they saw as a fight against the tyranny of fascism. However, this supposed alternative also takes away our liberty in perhaps a more insidious manner because of the smoke-screen it hides behind. One of the main distinctions between the two is the use of naked force by fascism as opposed to the subtle brainwashing used in a democracy. One method is blatant and crude, the other is subtle and sophisticated but achieving the same goal: our passive acceptance of a system that oppresses us. A major plank of this menacing strategy is the cult of leadership, a cult that is incompatible with the establishment of a society based on freedom and equality.

In any society there is a wide range of abilities, with most people falling somewhere in the middle. The collective intelligence, knowledge and experience of the many far outweighs the contribution of the few so-called ‘geniuses’. Despite this, human history has been marked by the usurpation of struggle and movements for social change by leaders who claim to know best. The struggle of men and women for freedom from the political, economic and spiritual shackles that bind them has always been long and painful. But time and again, having rid themselves of one tyranny, people have allowed another to replace it. Afraid to use their new found freedom, they hold up their wrists up to some new jailer. If a truly free society is to be achieved, which can only be an anarchist communist society, we must do more than get rid of the obvious sources of oppression. The working class must also transform itself as individuals so as to reject leaders, and any new tyranny.

It is not surprising that people are so willing to submit to leaders. Capitalist society is organised so as to bleed us of our ability to think for ourselves and take control of our own lives. This learned passivity manifests itself on the most subtle psychological levels. Individuals are taught from an early age that the best way they can fulfill the human urge to sociability, to belong, is to obey, to accept authority and the hierarchy of leader and follower. There are many examples of such hierarchies and the sub-cultures that support them, from political parties to skinhead gangs. There is a dress and hair code (think New Labour drones!) that identifies people as members of the group. To become a member, individuals signal their acceptance of its culture (and its hierarchy) by changing their clothes, their look, their views, to conform. If the individual questions group behaviour, or challenges the formal or informal leadership structures, then she/he is rejected and loses group membership, a traumatic experience for many. Even groups supposedly challenging capitalism, such as the old-style communist and trotskyist parties, incorporate and crystallize its values, and the hierarchies and division of labour into (for instance) ‘leaders’ and the ‘rank-and-file’. The subversion of the urge to sociability and the search (in a troubled world) for security has produced a cult of leadership. Schools and youth movements are urged to train children to become “the leaders of tomorrow”. Job references must emphasise the applicant’s “leadership qualities”. Workers must elect leaders who will negotiate with the boss. Political parties of left

and right choose a leader and then ask voters to choose between them, with the winner making decisions for the entire population. The cult of leadership pervades the whole of society.

## **Initiative**

Before we examine what is involved in this general acceptance of leaders, we want to differentiate it from something often confused with leadership: individual initiative. This fundamental impulse to originate and construct, to create something helpful to others and which wins their approval is common to all humanity. It is a self-expressive impulse that has nothing to do with the will to power of the few. The realization of the self, the expression of our uniqueness, is one of the most powerful of human aspirations and a basic building block of a free society and must be preserved at all costs in modern society. However, as anarchist communists, we profoundly believe that the individual can only realize her/himself in a social context, within the community and not in spite of it. We are asked to admire the rags-to-riches story of those who have rejected their origins for a life of wealth and privilege but rarely learn the human cost of success, both to the individual and those they have harmed along the way. We marvel at the fact that such people have become 'monsters', seemingly supra-human figures, without realizing that, having abandoned community, their individuality is all that defines them any more. In contrast, if we are able to express ourselves within the context of the many different groups and communities that we belong to, our individuality is enhanced and not, as is so often said, submerged.

We are also told we need leaders because without obedience there would be chaos. It is assumed that without anyone telling us what to do, we would not know what to do and nothing would get done. Nor would we know how to behave. As anarchists we know that human beings are naturally co-operative, problem-solving animals who could manage perfectly well without leaders, and that it is capitalist society that fosters aggression and selfish competition. It is rare indeed for leaders to actually have the answers that solve the social and personal problems confronting us. This need to overcome such problems leads us to charismatic men and women who we allow to offer leadership. What they offer is a sham, a demagogic ritual that actually persuades us that the work, the effort and sacrifice demanded to solve the problem we are confronting is worth it, to please the leader. Many supposedly progressive groups, including parties of the left, proclaim the simple need for *better* leaders. The workers, they say, or the people, have been let down by bad leaders. In other words, they want *themselves* to replace the 'bad' leaders currently in power. This is just another sham, a dangerous diversion for what we need is *no* leaders, not *better* ones.

## **Unnatural Societies**

The social hierarchy that we accept as a natural order is just as unnatural and illogical as government itself. There are no 'natural' leaders, only a ruling class which has grabbed power and uses this power to exploit and dominate the mass of humanity. Social classes are not ordained by nature but the historical product of an exploitative society. Unfortunately the acceptance of hierarchy has filtered down to all levels of society and even exists in the organizations workers create it challenge the system.



Collective responsibility is the alternative to leadership and the counterpart to equality. If we are to succeed in building an anarchist communist society, then the working class must learn to rely on itself. And each individual in that class must be prepared to take responsibility and participate in the transformation of society. The revolution must not only be against the ruling class but against leaders and hierarchy at all levels of society. And, most importantly, it must be a revolution against our own passivity.

# PATRIARCHY

A BIG WORD used by many to describe societies that are ruled by men. Originally it was used to refer to more 'primitive', older cultures, comparing them with the matriarchal (ruled by women) societies that had apparently come before. The term became popular in the late '60s and '70s with the growth of the women's movement. Instead of talking about capitalist society, which was a sex-neutral term implying the rule of capital, feminists were keen to use a word highlighting the dominant role men played in society. Bosses, military leaders, politicians, rapists, wife beaters, etc, are, for the most part, men. Even working class men rule in their own home and upper class women are dependent and subservient to their dominant husbands and fathers. By using the term patriarchy, feminists hoped to challenge the assumption made by revolutionaries of various tendencies: that ending capitalism would automatically end women's oppression.

Patriarchy could be used to describe a whole social system. In the '70s and 80s, debates raged as to whether such a social system existed. Traditional leftists in the Marxist organisations denounced the use of the term because it implied that men's oppression of women was more fundamental than the bosses' exploitation of the working class. Women activists accused the political organisations of putting all oppression down to class exploitation, so ignoring the existence of men's role in society as oppressors. Others tried to bridge the gap by using the term patriarchal capitalism, arguing that both sexual oppression and class exploitation were important: "By patriarchy we mean a system in which all women are oppressed, an oppression which is total, affecting all aspects of our lives. Just as class oppression preceded capitalism, so does our oppression. We do not acknowledge that men are oppressed as a sex although working class men, gay men and black men are oppressed as workers, gays and blacks, an oppression shared by gay, black and working class women." (Editorial statement: Scarlet Women 8, newsletter of the Socialist Feminist Current)

## A Side Issue?

In the end nothing was resolved. In the Leninist organisations, the 'class side' won and women's oppression was once again relegated to a side issue. Many women retreated angrily into separatism, reinforcing the view that men are the key enemy. So where do anarchist communists stand in all this? Anarchist communists reject the view that women's oppression will end with the overthrow of the bosses and recognise it cannot be explained simply in terms of an economic system. A more complex framework of analysis is needed, recognising the role of ideology and the role of men in keeping women down. For this the concept of patriarchy is useful, though a rather abstract term. This does not mean that male domination is natural or unchangeable. It is not men as such who are the enemy, but the roles of masculinity that they are playing and the power they have. At the same time women's oppression cannot be understood solely in terms of patriarchy as this fails to address the way capitalism has influenced women's oppression, creating different circumstances for women in different classes as well as giving them differing amounts

of power. In the same way that we cannot gloss over difference between men and women within the working class, we cannot gloss over differences between women. Nevertheless, the concept of patriarchy highlights the fact that women are oppressed and that they are not just oppressed by capital but by men, who have an interest in maintaining this situation.

In some cases it is obvious to see how men benefit from sexism: men's superior place in the labour market, and the emotional and material benefits they gain from the family. However, men benefit in less obvious ways, as in sexuality, with women bearing the burden of contraception. Anarchist communism is about transforming all areas of life - not just material circumstances. It follows that we need to challenge the whole culture which will involve revolutionising the relations between men and women, liberating both sexes from the traditional role that we have been brainwashed to play.

This struggle must be part of the general revolutionary movement to overthrow capitalism. Capitalism uses the gender differences to its own advantage - the 'macho man' for war and business and the 'feminine woman' for caring, supporting and picking up the pieces. The revolution must be one that ends all power, whether it is that of capital, the State or male. On its own, the concept of patriarchy is inadequate for understanding women's oppression. However used in conjunction with a general class analysis it plays an essential part in our understanding of society.

## OPPOSITION TO RACISM

ALTHOUGH ANARCHISM AS an idea is completely incompatible with any with any form of racism, the Anarchist movement has not been free of the racism inherent in the societies from which it has come, the most infamous being Bakunin's pan-slavism and anti-German views.

More than this, anarchism is largely the product of white Europeans who, however committed to the concept of a global emancipation of all oppressed people, were and are limited by their own cultural background, and one of the consequences of this is that the movement has concentrated on class and the state as the prime factors in achieving freedom and equality while other forms of exploitation such as race, but also gender, sexual orientation, disability, age etc are regarded as side issues which will either magically disappear on the abolition of capitalism or are subsumed as just another facet of the class struggle. Many, if not most, anarchists are conscious of these failings in our movement and while a full social revolution can only come from the combined struggle and theory of all the oppressed, with the aim of furthering our own understanding, here are some notes from the anarchist movement of today on why we oppose racism, what our analysis of racism is and how we can best fight it.

The idea that people should be treated differently because of physical or genetic differences is so ethically revolting and frankly ludicrous that you might well think it is a waste of time to refute such blind prejudices with cogent arguments. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity and to clear up a few difficulties, here are some key points. Anarchist communism is a society of all rational beings, the fact there are no substantial differences between so-called racial groups is a diversion, it would not matter to anarchists if there were and the whole debate on racial science, though doubtless interesting in terms of human biology, is politically useless as an argument for or against racism. The simplistic, anti-racist views of those in power obscure the real reasons for opposing racism. If Jesse Owens had won nothing at the Berlin Olympics he would still have been as entitled to equal treatment with white people and Hitler's National Socialism would still have been as evil and repugnant a doctrine. The problem with racists is not that they have small brains, as in a famous advertising campaign, but that they have wrong ideas. A second point is that cultural differences do not imply political differences. Anarchism recognises cultural differences between groups of people as well as between individuals. If my neighbour likes pop music and I like classical it should have no bearing if we meet together as part of our local community to, say, decide on installing central heating in our block of flats. In a future anarchist society, groups the world over will have to co-operate on practical issues all the time, this will give them an opportunity to share their cultural backgrounds but not for one to impose it on another. The problem is not of differing cultures but of differing power.

Finally on this subject, anarchism is distinguished from liberal anti-racism in economics. We do not advocate individual or national inheritance of money or any form of property. There has been much argument over the issue of compensating disadvantaged racial or national groups for exploitation of their ancestors, for example affirmative action on employment in America or compensation to African countries for the effects of the slave trade. The anarchist response is

to demand an immediate redistribution of goods and services worldwide on the basis of need enacted by a global revolution, but this is not the same as giving people what they have a right to or giving back what they have been robbed or cheated of. Even if it were possible to assess correctly all the injustices of the past, an incomprehensibly difficult task, we can do nothing to compensate the dead. More fundamentally we regard the world's wealth as an accumulation of the work and ideas of the whole human race throughout history and as such it should be equally available to all according to their needs. As an example, you could not read this article if paper had not been invented, but no-one can identify all the thousands involved in that process nor should that give, if it were possible, their descendants an exclusive right to the use of paper, because it is the common inheritance of humanity. The mistake of undoing the evils of the past is in perpetuating its divisions while in reality only a few in privileged elites benefit.

The problem for anarchism is how opposing racism fits in with righting all oppression and exploitation. Anarchism has traditionally seen class as the key merit of analysis, not only because it the key division in the establishment of capitalism in Europe but also because unlike racial or gender divisions, it is a totally social construct so that people can not only change class but that class itself can be abolished, whereas with race only the exploitative nature, not the concept itself, was to be changed. Equality between races or any other physical distinction would therefore logically come with the abolition of class. But this was not seen as being true the other way round, so that there could be a society in which there is no discrimination on grounds of race, which is still hierarchical and exploitative. While there is much truth in this, it is a fact that the vast majority of struggle initiated in favour of the working class, e.g. social democracy (for example, the Labour Party) and Marxist-Leninism, have proved capable of taking power on behalf of the working class without showing any sign of abolishing inequality. Without conscious effort to that end, it does not follow that an anarchist revolution would eliminate existing prejudices. While the traditional anarchist emphasis on small-scale community decision-making would have a very real danger of leaving global differences in wealth unchanged from that of capitalism.

The struggle against racism does not preclude a simultaneous equality in all other forms of social relations; in fact it logically requires it. Overcoming racism is not a separate issue or a first step in achieving an Anarchist communist society, but an integral part of the process. How large a part depends on how much states and bosses exploit people on racial lines and how well we stop them subverting the struggle with liberal myths of 'equality before the law' and token 'success' stories of individuals making good under capitalism. As with any form of oppression people of colour can only be secure in their freedom if everyone else is. This is where the struggle against racism may provide a keystone of libertarian theory, for racism is little more than the inverse side of social solidarity. Identifying this natural sense of solidarity with exclusion of others gives racism its strength, but in fighting it we can acquire the tools of a co-operative social interaction.

As materialists we believe that the struggle for freedom comes out of the real experience of people fighting their oppressors and developing an alternative society from the process of doing so. This means that the prime move must come from each oppressed group itself. For racism in Britain this involves the non-white population organising according to their own understanding and experience, but with the support of those who are oppressed in other ways. This is not simply a union of different groups working together to make themselves more effective, but a recognition that individuals face many forms of oppression simultaneously and just as each of these can only be fought by joining together with others who suffer in the same way, the whole edifice of tyranny can only be overcome by joining together all oppressed groups. No basis of

struggle is intrinsically more important than another in achieving this, the important thing is to form from them a unity of theory and practice. Just to finish, this piece has been long on theory and lacking in practical ideas as to combating racism in everyday life, which is just as important to the anarchist position, and we hope to deal with this in detail soon. In the meantime, if this article is too heavy, feel free to bop some white supremacist on the head with it.

# MILITARISM

OF ALL THE 'ISMS', militarism is the most poisonous, destructive and dangerous. When active it destroys people, cultures and rational thought. When relatively passive (though it is never truly passive), it enters the minds and value systems of society in a way that reinforces conformity and obedience.

Military values require uniformity, not only of appearance but also of attitude and values. The armed forces expend considerable effort in ensuring that soldiers at all levels accept without question the inherent and unquestionable superiority of their methods, aims and ideology. In the heat of battle there is no scope for questioning the validity of the campaign or particular action. Robot-like acceptance is paramount. Militarism, the glorification of military values and methods, has a long history. In Europe, Asia and South America that undoubted symbol of militarism, the military uniform and with it social prestige, has existed for thousands of years, as witness Assyrian carved reliefs looted from Iraq but now in the British Museum showing the disciplined ranks of the king's army; these are well over 2,500 years old. Military values also accept without question the validity of hierarchy. Orders start at the top and are passed down to the ranks. Whilst there is scope for individual decision-making – no large organization can cope without some imaginations and initiative – this is only permitted within a strict and rigid chain of command. Despite skepticism within the ranks, orders are there to be obeyed. Obedience is an essential feature of the military approach and, in wartime, failure to obey can lead to severe punishments.

## Militarism And Society

A further feature of the military approach is discipline. The soldier, sailor or air force person must act as part of a team, exercising self-discipline in all circumstances. And this self-discipline must be an extension and internalization of the wider military discipline. Discipline, hierarchy and obedience combine to realize most effectively the ultimate aim of military values, the activation of violence. Since the days of the spear and the bow, military technology has pursued a single goal, the most effective destruction of the enemy with the minimum loss to one's own side. Capitalism's vast investment in, and profits from such technology has given the armed forces of the world's most powerful nations a killing capacity that now makes the mass destructions of Dresden or Hiroshima look like tea parties.

Militarism is the application of military methods and values to the wider society. This is done most effectively when it accompanies some other so-called truth such as religion, racial purity, imperialism and nationalism. In its most effective expressions – Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia – all opposition was either eliminated or cowed and the whole society subjected to military methods and organization, leading ultimately to war. Whether racial nationalism in Germany or 'socialism in one country' in Russia (leading to the Great Patriotic War of 1941–5), the identification of nation with the army was a powerful concoction. More recently there have been pale

imitations such as Saddam Hussein's long war against Iran or the racial-religious-nationalist ideology that fuelled the Rwandan genocide, with the virtual destruction of civil society in all its senses. The re-emergence of religious fundamentalism as a significant force, combined with nationalism and militarism, is brewing a truly powerful cocktail of destruction. Last seen in pre-war Japan, it is on the rise both in the Islamic states along Russia's borders and in America itself. Imagine a christian-imperialist-militarist USA saving the world through war with the godless hordes beyond its borders.

## **Militaristic, Us?**

Militarism is not restricted to dictatorships. It insidiously permeates many corners of life in supposedly peace-loving and democratic societies. Young boys in particular are subtly and not so subtly inculcated into militaristic behaviour and thought. The scouts and the various military cadet forces all pretend to offer individual growth and adventure but actually promote military ideas and values. Should anyone remain skeptical, compare the uniforms, organization and activities of the scouts with those of the Hitler Youth; the similarities are remarkable. Such militaristic youth organizations are symptomatic of an underlying tendency towards militarism in capitalist society. Violent computer games and videos are the scandal of polite society while teenagers fingering sub-machine guns or clambering over tanks whenever the army comes to town to recruit is widely seen as okay.

The British military presence in Northern Ireland has further deepened and extended public acceptance of militarism. The fact that the British armed forces have systematically used repressive violence to maintain capitalist order has raised barely a murmur on the mainland and is largely unseen outside the Six Counties. Compare this to the outcry whenever a British soldier is killed or injured or imprisoned for gunning down an unarmed civilian. The British soldier has been raised upon a pedestal and even when convicted or murdering a civilian is considered to be innocent by the Establishment and mass media.

The annual poppy day rituals at war memorials throughout Britain remind the populace of the importance of the armed forces to our culture. Pretending to honour those who were killed or wounded in war (while insulting the widows and handicapped with poverty level pensions), they only serve to glorify it. These ceremonies make the entire machinery of war sacred, giving it a religious-patriotic-spiritual quality. Though fought on behalf of the ruling classes, wars are legitimized and placed beyond criticism. Spectacles such as these keep the public interested in things military at a fairly constant level, ready to be mobilized in time of the ruling class's need to go to war. They, and the accompanying propaganda, are part of a mythologizing process that legitimizes all past British military actions. And, by extension, serve to legitimize all future conflicts.

Militarism, whilst low-key in the so-called liberal democracies, has been given a new dimension and magical quality by advanced technology. There are no limits on what technology and science are supposed to be able to do and it is brought into our lives by combat magazines and cameras in 'smart' missiles. We are not told, until after, just how badly supposedly advanced military technology performs or its effectiveness at killing 'our' troops, friendly forces or civilians. Death by friendly fire is a price the winning side is well prepared to pay and nothing compared to what the enemy will do unless stopped! The constant refrain of superior military technology



is meant to convince the home front of its moral superiority and to justify investment into new weapons to maintain that superiority in future wars.

## **The Cult Of Arms**

Because weapons must be sold to armies and their use sold to the people who must fight and pay, they are often publicized in startling ways. Fascination with military technology has been harnessed to give the state's murder machines a sexy quality: look at that fighter bomber, admire its power, its smooth lines, its performance. Combat chic, surgical strikes. The arrogance felt by the military elites is shared by the ordinary soldier in militarized armies (as opposed to, for instance, conscript armies, militias or guerilla forces), based on a cult of masculinity which reaches poisonous heights in the armed forces. The parody of what men should be like is given its full expression through the cult of heavy drinking, brutality, hardness and segregation from women. This leads in turn to a casual brutality in occupied countries (and to those towns in Britain occupied by army barracks), for instance the Paras in Ireland and the Falklands, US Marines in Okinawa, Dutch troops in Bosnia and Canadian soldiers in Somalia. Mass rapes of German women by Russian soldiers in WWII, by Serbian forces in Bosnia or by interahamwe militias in Rwanda are an inevitable consequence of a militarism built on the manipulation and exaggeration of the diseased masculinity capitalism fosters. Any idea that the armed forces are based on gender-neutral team-work and merit is dangerous rubbish and the best thing working class men and women can do is fight to dismantle such a corrupt institution.

Fortunately, but not always successfully, militarism has been countered by anti-militarist movements. Revolutionary anarchists have always taken a lead in anti-militarist activities. It should be obvious to all (but isn't!) that the people who have least to gain and the most to sacrifice on the altar of militarism are working class people. Apart from the cost of developing and maintaining the military in peacetime (how many jet fighters equal a hospital – not many), the cost in wartime is measured in blood. It is undoubtedly true that anti-war movements organised by official trade union and labour movements have usually been hopeless failures and often complete betrayals. The ignominious collapse of the Second International's policy of opposing WWI and recent loyalty to the state's cause in Iraq and Afghanistan fall into this category.

It is perhaps the constant and subtle techniques of mass persuasion which accounts for the apparent enthusiasm for wars by large sections of the working class. This misplaced faith in the State and the Nation has had disastrous consequences. Given the current military capacity of countries like the USA, and its willingness to use all the weapons in its arsenal, no matter how horrific and destructive, the war against militarism has never been more important.

# CRIME AND PUNISHMENT 1

THE WHOLE DEBATE about crime is hopelessly confused and confusing. One thing is certain, in the population at large, there is a fear of crime which politicians, especially the Tories but increasingly New Labour, are exploiting for political gain. There is an ever-growing demand by reactionaries of all kinds to “get tough with crime”. It is an easy slogan to make which guarantees attention but, despite decades of initiatives and massive spending on policing, courts and prisons, crime is nowhere near being defeated. Why is this?

## So What Do We Mean By Crime?

In capitalist society, what crimes actually are is determined by the state. They may, or may not, coincide with what working class people think is wrong behaviour. People living on social security benefits or the often extremely low wages offered by capitalists cannot survive on what is offered them. Is it any wonder that people resort to social security ‘fraud’, shoplifting or other petty crimes or don’t ask which particular lorry something offered in a pub or over the garden fence has ‘fallen off the back of’? Their attitudes change when they become the victims of crime, naturally! But not all crimes associated with poverty are tolerated. It is an unfortunate fact that some working class people are quite happy to steal from or abuse their own kind. Stealing television sets and videos on council estates or racial or sexual attacks are examples of criminal behaviour which is not acceptable to the working class.

Does this mean people have double standards? Not at all. Crime must be seen in class terms. Crime is defined and combated largely by the ruling classes acting through the state to maintain their order and protecting their property. The maintenance of order is presented as being in the interests of all classes but in reality is all about creating stable conditions for the promotion of capitalism. Capitalism is itself based upon a form of robbery: exploitation. But this is not defined by the state as crime. Similarly, we all have personal property to protect but the state is mainly concerned with the protection of private property and the instruments of legal robbery: banks, factories, shops etc. Working class people are generally aware of this. It is common to hear that there exists “one law for the rich and another for the poor’. So far, from an anarchist communist standpoint, we must be skeptical, to say the least, about the whole debate about crime.

## Capitalism & Crime

We are clear about one thing: anti-social crime, meaning anything which oppresses, robs or does violence to the working class, must be opposed. We cannot wait until ‘after the revolution’ to fight the active enemies of the people. Racist attacks, sexual assaults, muggings are not acceptable and we have to find solutions to these problems here and now. This will mean vigilance and self-defense by the affected communities. Middle class crimes and assaults on the working class

by asset strippers and speculators, though often invisible, are also insidious and must be opposed collectively, where possible, in this long dark night of capitalism. Of course such activities are rarely seen by the state as crimes at all, or if they are, they carry relatively light punishments.

Anti-social acts are a direct expression of predatory capitalism. Selfishness, bullying, violence and legalised robbery are all inherent in the system. The tentacles of class society and its ethics have entered into every part of life. It is not accidental that men are responsible for most crimes and that women hardly figure in crime statistics. Men are socialised from birth to be aggressive, violent, hard and tough, whilst women are socialised to be submissive and caring. This sort of upbringing does untold psychological violence to boys as they are shaped by their parents and society to struggle and fight. Add to this a strict and regimenting school system, a future of unemployment or dead-end jobs together with boredom and you have a mixture which invites trouble. This is not to excuse macho behaviour but is an attempt to place it in perspective. Crime and capitalism are inseparable.

## **Crime & The Anarchist Communist Society**

If crime is a part of capitalist society, what will happen in an anarchist communist society? Anarchist communism is based upon the principles of a classless society in which freedom arises out of community solidarity and an enlightened system of socialisation and education. Private property will be abolished and the goal of production will be for the fulfillment of human need, not the accumulation of private wealth. Goods and services will be planned by the active communities working with similar communities elsewhere. The individual will be encouraged to take part in decision-making. In this way, goods and services will be provided to meet everyone's needs, so far as this is possible. Also, many services will be provided by the community just as public libraries are today, so that entertainment, transport etc will be on the basis of free access. Anarchist communism requires the abolition of money and exploitation. With a moneyless society there will be no possibility to accumulate wealth beyond that which a person can possibly hold on to. Since goods are free, there will be little point in stealing and therefore most, if not all, crimes against property will disappear.

In a caring society which will do away with the desperate struggle for everyday survival, many of the material bases of want will disappear. The revolution will consciously seek to eliminate anti-social behaviour and so education and the socialisation of children will be directed towards tolerance, equality and sharing. Violence, which is an ever-present undercurrent of life today, will be discouraged through the development of co-operative play and education. The current obsession with aggressive individualism combined with the glorification of all kinds of competitive aspiration produces many social ills, not just crime. Whilst individualism as a means of achieving personal fulfillment is to be encouraged, it must be done so in a positive way. Gain for the individual is again for society as a whole. The point of anarchist communism is not to stifle individual effort but to allow it to express itself in constructive directions. In present day society, most people are cut off from their neighbours. Very few real communities survive and those that do are deeply imbued with the values of capitalist society. In an anarchist communist society, community and solidarity will bind society together.

Despite education and other means of socialisation there will be isolated acts of violence, sexual assaults and other anti-social behaviour. Many of these will be carried out by people who are

emotionally disturbed. The community has a right to protect itself and steps will have to be taken to eliminate violent and other destructive behaviour. Such people should be cared for as far as possible within the community. This approach has nothing common with the current dumping of the mentally disturbed onto the streets. In 'face to face' communities everyone will recognise their neighbours and take on a collective and individual responsibility for social care and control. Psychiatric and medical help will be aimed at the integration of disturbed individuals and the promotion of their welfare. There are no easy solutions to some disturbed and obsessive behaviour such as sexual assaults, arson etc. But the approach to such problems will be enlightened, therapeutic and socially-based, not punitive.

## **Punishment**

This leads us to a discussion of punishment. Punishment, the infliction of violence for so-called crimes, has been a feature of virtually every society from the earliest recorded history. The Old Testament approach to punishment in which not only the guilty are harmed but also their relatives and descendents is to be found in many societies. Aspects of this approach have come down to us today in Islamic law and in the last Tory government's initiative in blaming and punishing parents for their children's crimes.

There are several justifications given for punishment, all of which are seriously flawed. Revenge is the most primitive; being based on the desire to 'get even' with the criminal. The 'retributive' approach starts from the assumption that individual crimes deserve punishment; murderers deserve to be executed, rapists deserve castration. Apart from the problem of gauging what is an appropriate punishment for each and every crime in a whole range of circumstances, this approach assumes that one act of inflicting pain (robbery, assault etc) is to be condemned while another, that of punishment (which might be equally brutal e.g. stoning of adulterers) is fine. It also accepts that a higher authority, i.e. the state, alone has the right to inflict punishment.

Linked to the vengeance justification for punishment is the idea of deterrence. Indeed the two are usually cited together in determining a 'suitable' punishment in the courts. The idea that criminal behaviour will be reduced by the threat of punishment on being caught does not stand up. Firstly, many serious crimes take place on the spur of the moment when people lose self-control through anger, jealousy or drugs. There is no thought of the consequences of such acts. Secondly, premeditated criminal acts are not deterred by the thought of an eventual punishment. What concerns criminals is the likelihood of getting caught. If being arrested seems likely, the crime doesn't get committed. A few hundred years ago pick-pockets were executed at public hangings. Active among the enthralled crowds were professional pick-pockets! So much for deterrence.

The idea that society will be better off by carrying out punishments misses the point. An unequal, unfair society creates its own criminality. What needs to be eliminated is the social and economic base for crime. Similarly the idea of reforming criminals within the prison system is a sick joke. There is precious little enlightenment in Britain's repressive prison regime. In modern Britain, it is not the criminals that need to be 'reformed' but society itself which needs to be changed, lock, stock and barrel.

## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT 2

THE DESIRE TO PUNISH – to inflict pain on perceived wrong-doers – has a long and inglorious history. It is an essential fact of punishment that it is imposed by people in power upon those who are relatively powerless, and for a specific purpose: to preserve a customary way of life, a society, a political system from attack or destruction at the hands of the disobedient. Religions, which have so often been the hand-maidens of authoritarian rule, are full of accounts of the most horrendous punishments delivered by God and his followers to those who deny his authority or commandments. An eternity of hellish pain awaits all who transgress in even minor ways, if they do not then submit to his authority before they die. The secular arm of the State – its police and army, magistrates, teachers and bosses – also reserves its greatest punishments for those who defy its power. It is also true that punishment is ineffective in achieving its (stated) aims.

Anarchist communists seriously object to the idea of punishment, on a number of grounds: moral, ideological and practical. Kropotkin, for example, in his pamphlet *Prisons And Their Moral Influence On Prisoners* demolishes all of the arguments used by the State to defend human incarceration. In what seems a remarkably up to date observation, he wrote in 1877 that “Once a man (sic) has been in prison, he will return. It is inevitable, and statistics prove it. The annual reports of the administration of criminal justice in France show that one-half of all those who yearly get into the police courts for minor offences received their education in prisons.... As for central prisons, more than one-third of the prisoners released from the supposedly correctional institutions are re-imprisoned in the course of the twelve months after their liberation” (from Kropotkin’s *Revolutionary Pamphlets*, Dover Books). The picture in these islands is hardly different today, indicating a pathological lack of imagination on the part of the State. In Britain, around one person in a thousand (and in the USA, it is one in every hundred) is currently in prison – and crime is said to be continually on the rise! So much for punishment’s effectiveness in combating crime.

### Justifications

There are a number of arguments supposed to support the idea of punishment. These include the idea the idea that a given action deserves a certain reward or punishment – the ‘good’ child gets a reward, the ‘bad’ child is punished. Where good and bad actions are arbitrarily defined, where they are not agreed to by all but simply imposed definitions, and where supposedly bad actions include a range of things that are good for the human being (for instance to express yourself rather than sit quietly or to steal food when you are hungry), the rules of society will always be broken. The setting down of punishments in some kind of code and their supposedly objective application always reflects the arbitrary values, attitudes and prejudices of those writing the laws and enforcing them – the ruling class in other words. Since most laws are designed to protect private property and enforce social inequality, it is not surprising that most punishment is meted out against those who steal and upon those with least – the working class.

Another standard argument for punishment is that it deters people from committing crime or other 'anti-social' acts, again defined in terms which support the status quo. The problem once more is that it just does not work. As Kropotkin pointed out, the prisons were full of persistent offenders, despite frequent punishment. Hanging, for a range of offences from murder to the theft of an animal or even a single handkerchief, did not end 18<sup>th</sup> Century crime. Indeed it was often remarked that, while the people stood enthralled at the public hanging of a petty thief, his or her brothers in crime were working the crowd and relieving the admiring public of their valuables! So much for the ultimate deterrent!

## **Primitive Justice**

Many people have a pretty primitive need to extract revenge for a wrong committed against them. Blood feuds are an example of this, where one wrongdoing has to be matched by another from generation to generation, to the absurd point that the killing goes on even when the original cause of the vendetta has been forgotten about. As a rational response to wrongdoing, especially on the scale committed by the State, vengeance which is motivated by irrational feelings must rate as a wholly inappropriate response.

A further approach (and oh! how inventive society's intellectuals have been in trying to defend the indefensible) includes the idea that wrongdoers should be helped or reformed, though there is always a surprising amount of pain included in any 'rehabilitative' process! Unfortunately the State has no real interest in exploring the social causes of crime which might prevent it in the first place, and in curing the criminal only when society at large turns against excessive punishment. The State may lip-service to the idea of rehabilitation but for every John McVicar or Jimmy Boyle, famous criminals who have both 'reformed', there are hundreds of thousands who gave not. Punishment remains to keep the lid on social unrest but patently fails to do so.

So what is the anarchist communist view on punishment? Firstly, it should be realised that we reject all the usual justifications and methods of punishment both today and in any future anarchist communist society. Capitalism damages people in countless ways, so it is not surprising this expresses itself in anti-social acts and behaviour. Capitalism creates the conditions within which 'crimes' are committed – crimes both of violence and against property in the form of poverty, unachievable desires, the flaunting of wealth and social status and so on, dividing, depriving and humiliating millions of people. Anarchist communism, in contrast, is based on a perfect equality of goods and choices, involving people in the creation and management of society that makes life worthwhile, secure and free.

In capitalist society there are huge differences in wealth and power, so it is very likely that its victims turn to violence and robbery in ways that are similar to the workings of capitalism itself. A society based on social justice, equality, freedom and the abolition of money. Given these circumstances, many of the preconditions which give rise to crime and punishment will disappear. Similarly, the abolition of the concept of the victimless crime will remove a whole category of acts from the realm of wider social involvement.

The classical anarchist approach to the problem of anti-social behaviour is therapeutic; to persuade the individual to remove themselves from the society they are harming and to put themselves out of harm's way. In extreme cases, where offered help was rejected, communities could claim the right not to have to endure the behaviour any more, imposing a kind of exile, shunning

or turning away upon the individual or group. If harm was threatened or inflicted, the right to self-defence which all humans would retain would not be unknown. And surely, both individuals, groups and societies have the right to protect themselves from internal and external threats. Care would need to be taken that such a therapeutic approach was not used as a punishment, to control dissidents or stigmatise those different to the majority in some way. This would require a completely open society unlike today, when the punishment, control and incarceration of the 'mad' in secure hospitals goes on largely in secret. It would be foolish to argue that anarchist communist society would implicitly mean the abolition of anti-social behaviour – but what constitutes anti-social behaviour would have an extremely narrow definition unlike today, when it is extremely broadly defined.

There are no simple solutions to the problems caused by serial rapists and killers, for instance, two extreme forms of anti-social behaviour that no individual or society could be expected to tolerate. Our response should be governed by two principles which often exist in tension with each other but which are not incompatible: firstly the justification of individual and communal self-defence and protection, and secondly, the freedom of the individual. A caring approach, applied in a humanitarian and non-harmful way must in the end be the basis of an anarchist communist alternative to punishment.

# GREEN POLITICS

IT CAN BE argued that the logical consequence of libertarian communist thought has always been the creation of a 'green' society since it has always posited the need for the destruction of capitalism, the system which, as we know, must expand or die and which has given birth to the ideologies of productivism and consumerism.

Anarchist and libertarian communist thinkers in the early days of the revolutionary working class movement, in their criticism of the 'modern' industrial system and its tendency to transform the worker into a part of the machinery, can be seen as proto-greens. But it would, however, be stretching things to say that the early anarchist movement was anything like a consciously 'green' movement, despite the critical contribution of people like Elisee Reclus, William Morris, Edward Carpenter and Peter Kropotkin. Whilst all of the above writers produced work that contained, 'green' implications or at least sentiment, none can be seriously considered as systematically 'green' thinkers. What can be argued is that the communist vision of people like Morris and Kropotkin, that of a de-centralised society of integrated labour in humanised environments, stands in stark contrast to many 'socialists' (beginning with some of the 'utopian' socialists but given a 'scientific' basis by Marx) who considered The Factory as a model for the new society.

## Socialism And Progress

Such thinking found its realisation in the rapid industrialisation under state capitalism in the Soviet Union, which although bound to do so by its need to compete in world markets, found a perfect ideological support in the (generally unchallenged) belief amongst socialists that the industrialisation of the world was an 'historical necessity'. It is no coincidence that some of the most horrendous environmental destruction has been carried out under the banner of socialism! Unfortunately, anarchists have not been exempt from holding an uncritical attitude towards industrial 'civilisation'. Whilst it would be unusual to find any outright glorification of the modern factory amongst anarchists, undoubtedly from reading anarcho-syndicalist literature from the end of the last century, right up until quite recently, the impression is given that technology is not up for criticism and, disturbingly, that little life takes place outside of the factory. Anarchist communists haven't been much better in this respect. Why is that? Obviously, anarchists and libertarian communists are products of their times and the level of environmental destruction at the time of the first mass anarchist movements was by no means as apparent as it has been in the period since World War Two. Whilst revolutionaries argued that capitalism was destroying the worker and peasant, body and soul, it was not so obvious that capital was in the process of destroying the earth on which both worker and peasant stood. Neither was it possible to foresee that capital would develop the capacity to annihilate all life on the planet in the space of a few weeks or less with the aid of nuclear fission. The consciously 'green' movements which paralleled the great workers movements were generally mystical, often reactionary 'middle-class'



movements, sometimes strongly Malthusian and racist and rarely identified with the existing 'progressive' social movements.

## **The Green 'Revolution'**

Yet today much of the green movement claims to hold much in common with 'anarchism'. Even some of the most reformist elements in the green movement, from time to time, feel obliged to make noises about non-hierarchical organisation, devolved decision-making and other things historically identified with anarchist politics. Amongst large numbers of the direct-action orientated green activists, 'anarchist' sentiment is strong, though often very unfocused, and there is contempt for traditional forms of politics. There is also alienation from the traditional focus of anarchism, the class struggle. Often the working class are identified with the 'culture of industry' and, understandably, the notion of class solidarity is easily lost on, for example, road protesters (often unemployed) whose regular contact with their class brothers and sisters is in the form of £2.50 an hour rent-a-cop security guards!

## **Social Ecology**

The anarchist movement itself has been forced to take on board explicitly green politics, has had to confront the issue of progress and has had to seriously discuss the nature of technology. Perhaps the first libertarian communist writer to comprehensively address the question of the ecological crisis and its solution has been Murray Bookchin. Indeed, Bookchin can be counted amongst the first theorists of the modern ecology movement itself, with books like 'Our Synthetic Environment' (1962) and 'Crisis in our Cities' (1965) setting the agenda for what would later be known as Social Ecology. Whilst using the anarchist critique of hierarchical power and the relationship between means and ends as a starting point.

Bookchin has developed a political perspective that has had a considerable impact upon, particularly, the North American green movement. His popularity amongst US and Canadian greens has been bolstered by his argument that the 'traditional' focus of revolutionary attention (whether Marxist, Anarcho-syndicalist or Anarchist Communist), the struggle of the working class, is no longer central to the revolutionary project. His belief that the key to social revolution lay in the development of oppositional lifestyles and the 'new' social movements (feminist, anti-nuclear, anti-racist etc.) has recently been revised to some extent. Social Ecological thought, which sees the potential for a liberatory technology (liberated from its present owners) in a future ecological libertarian society has come into conflict with another green current claiming to be anarchist, the anarcho-primitivists. The anarcho-primitivist position basically holds that a non-hierarchical society is impossible whilst any form of industrial civilisation remains and that, therefore, talk of a liberatory technology is nonsense. Whilst many writings from the anarcho-primitivist 'movement' (it is a far from homogenous entity) are an excellent counter-balance to technophile arguments coming from various sources (including 'revolutionary') their overall perspective lacks any revolutionary dynamic and often betrays a confused misanthropic idealist fanaticism at odds with authentic anarchism.

## **Towards a Green Libertarian Communism**

Any would-be revolutionary movement today cannot ignore the necessity of developing a 'green' perspective. But this does not mean simply tagging on a few eco-friendly ideas to an otherwise concrete grey politics. It entails an active engagement with specifically anti-capitalist forces within the green movement. It means presenting a class struggle anarchist analysis of the present struggles against environmental destruction to those involved, to those effected. The struggles against the roads, for just one example, are implicitly class struggles as they challenge not merely present government policy but capitalist logic itself, the logic (and necessity!) for expansion. Likewise, when the greens talk about 'zero growth' anarchist and libertarian communists must point out the explicitly communist nature of this idea. Equally, the latter must attempt to understand the implications of their politics for the environment (in the broadest sense). Already a dynamic is appearing as the limitations of traditional politics are becoming increasingly exposed as the world and its inhabitants face the choice of a new society or slow annihilation. If the historical choice has been between socialism or barbarism it is now between green libertarian communism and a barbaric death in clouds of toxic fumes.

# FEDERALISM

ONE PART OF THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT is collectivist in the sense that they believe that a future anarchist society will be based on a series of communities of one sort or another. Anarchist communists in particular envisage individual freedom and security, for instance, as deriving from social life, where we live and work in solidarity with one another. Our goal, therefore, is not a world of individuals concerned only with their own well-being regardless of others, but one in which personal freedom develops and is expressed to the benefit of all. Freedom comes from, and does not stand in opposition to, community.

Collectivist anarchists are, unfortunately, lumped alongside all other anarchists who themselves are portrayed by the media as isolated individuals bent on terror. The reality is that, throughout history and mostly even today, anarchists work in groups and some, like the Anarchist Federation, seek to build large-scale national and international organizations. We seek to build a mass anarchist movement. The problem that presents itself, once we reject individualism, is how to organise the movement and, hopefully, a future society in ways that maximize the benefit of solidarity while preserving and extending individual and collective freedom. How do we, in our revolutionary struggle and the eventual transformation of society, avoid the pitfalls of bureaucracy, elites and power?

To quote one Italian anarchist, Errico Malatesta, "An anarchist organization must.... allow for complete autonomy and independence and therefore full responsibility to individuals and groups; free agreement between those who think it is useful to come together for co-operative action, for common aims; a moral duty to fulfil one's pledges and to take no action which is contrary to the accepted programme". (*Il Risveglio*, October 15 1927). In other words, for an anarchist organization to operate effectively on a principled basis, its members must combine freedom with responsibility, full participation in the decision-making processes with a commitment to carry out collective decisions. No anarchist organization can be effective if its members act against collective aims and methods. Equally however, no organization can be anarchist without total freedom to take part in the formulation of goals, aims and methods plus, ultimately, the right to withdraw from this process.

## The Federalist Approach

The usual method adopted by anarchists to combine freedom with organization has been federalism. This idea is the reverse of the standard form of organization in which decisions are made at the top by an elite and carried out by the rank and file. Under a federal system, autonomous members of the organization, organised in groups or branches at the base make the decisions which are carried out by the organization. Political power flows from the base to the summit or rather, from the circumference to the centre, since anarchist organization is horizontal (based on equality), not vertical (based on inequality and hierarchy). Anarchist organizations should be expressions of the collective voice, not directing centers which control people.

The basic 'unit' is the member who voluntarily joins the organization. Usually a member will be part of a local or industrial group which freely agrees to join a larger unit at, for instance, the district level. The district is in turn affiliated to a regional body which is part of a national and ultimately international federation. The most local or central group will take those decisions which affect it most closely and which it is best placed to decide about. Small collectives might decide how to live and work together – this will have small impact outside. A district commune might decide on the location of a new medical centre but the damming of a river, which has much wider consequences, would have to be agreed upon by a group of communes, with all interests represented. Each part of society, which is, of course, the individuals comprising that society, can influence the orientation of the whole, its goals and methods. Should a group disagree with decisions reached, it has the right to withdraw from the process and its affiliation with the whole. However, if it has participated in the decision-making process, to quote Malatesta again, it has a duty "to take no action which is contrary to the accepted program" so long as it remains within the boundaries of the whole: whether organization, commune or federation.

For a federal system to operate in an anarchist fashion, there must be the greatest possible degree of involvement by members, free communication and checks on the development of either 'leaders' or 'functionaries', for instance through rotation of all representational positions, the regular and extraordinary recall of delegates or 'officials', and a ban on permanent postings. Strictly speaking, in both anarchist organizations and societies, there will be no 'official' or 'formal' positions and no 'officials' to occupy them. Each part of organization and society represents itself directly through mass media accessible to all with an interest, and through temporary delegates, sometimes elected, sometimes chosen by lot. In the end, however, the health of any organization will be dependent on and ultimately reflect the enthusiasm and commitment of those who comprise it.

Not only anarchist organizations but anarchist societies would operate on a federal basis. Society would be a 'honey-comb' or 'lattice' or inter-connected groups, collectives and communes, sometimes making decisions for themselves (but sharing information about the decisions with others), sometimes joining with other groups to make joint decisions and carry out joint activities. Each group would have the right to self-determination in respect of its own affairs and also the right to secede from the whole in extreme circumstances. The basic social grouping would probably be the neighbourhood commune (for decisions affecting all who live in a particular area) and the affinity group (for those who work together or otherwise co-operate). These would voluntarily federate to a wider body, perhaps regional or provincial (in the former case) or as a federation or association (in the latter). Delegates from the groups and communes would deal with issues that required the co-operation of more people or other communes. There would be a natural limit to the complexity of this form of organization since, at a certain level or beyond a certain point, co-operation ceases to be more effective than at local levels.

## **In Practice**

Federalism is a straightforward form of organization which combines the maximum individual and local freedom and autonomy with collective decisions. It permits planning on a wide scale through negotiation, co-operation and mutual agreement, whether planning is being done by a group of anarchists or a complete anarchist society. Federalism, with its vital right to secession,

safeguards all minorities from potential majorities, even anarchist ones! However though an ideal picture, federalism alone cannot create or preserve a free society. It must be combined with the elimination of centralized power, hierarchy, authority and inequality. Where these are preserved, freedom is a sham and any federation entirely bogus, a fact that would be revealed as soon as one group challenged or opposed another. In theory, the old Soviet Union was a federation of republics which enjoyed the right of secession. In reality it was probably the most centralized of twentieth century nations. The federal structure of Yugoslavia was similarly bogus. When the central authority failed, as it did in the 1990s, local nationalisms and ethnic rivalries re-emerged and the pseudo-federations disintegrated, with disastrous consequences. Any such federation based on group, social or national inequalities, and which involves none of the essential features of the anarchist vision, can form the basis of anarchist organization nor complete the task of revolution. It is the task of revolutionary anarchists and the working class to create it.

# INTERNATIONALISM

INTERNATIONALISM is the solidarity of revolutionaries across national boundaries, Is a key part of working class struggle. The last two hundred years or so has seen national states glorifying patriotism and nationalism. As a tool of social control it has been very effective, indeed millions of people have sacrificed their lives for the national cause.

The First and Second World Wars are just the clearest examples of a continual process of aggression carried out by nation states against their rivals.

## **Collapse Of The Old World Order**

As Leninist 'communism' has collapsed all over the world, the ideological gap has been to a large extent filled by nationalism. This is carried to an absurd degree in countries like the former Yugoslavia, where statelet confronts statelet, all in the name of national pride and self-determination. Yet this nationalism which has been so powerful in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century goes against the whole development of capitalism. If nothing else, capitalism is internationalist, at least as far as the major corporations are concerned. These enterprises are huge, employ hundreds of thousands of workers in several countries and often possess capital in excess of some of the world's second rank nations. Firms like ICI, Exxon, General Motors, Coca Cola, Sony etc., whilst being based within nation states, owe no country loyalty. Their goal is growth and increased profits. They are unwilling to be held back by mere national governments. Partly in recognition of this fact of capitalist life and partly to secure the domination of the world's markets, once again major imperialist rivalries are beginning to emerge. NAFTA, the EC, and the courting by Japan of countries around the Pacific Rim, are all aimed at securing domination of the world's markets.

## **The Need For Unity**

For these reasons alone, it is vital that the revolutionary working class movement looks for unity. However, workers' internationalism is not simply a response to the international threat of capitalism. Internationalism dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, especially to the formation of the International Workingmen's (sic) Association (The First International). There was a recognition of the need for international revolution and thus the necessity of an internationally-organised revolutionary movement. Despite the cynical manipulation of socialists such as Marx, who preferred to wreck the First International rather than let it fall under the influence of the anarchist, and the patriotism and chauvinism displayed by the social democratic parties which wrecked the Second International on the eve of the Great War, internationalism has been a continuing threat. Lenin's Third Internationalism was a tool of the Bolsheviks, becoming under Stalin a shameless conveyor belt for Soviet foreign policy.

These pseudo-internationalisms do not invalidate the necessity of international solidarity, they make it all the more vital. Unlike capitalism which seeks conformity on a world scale - Big Macs and Pepsi from New York to Beijing- internationalism welcomes and supports the diversities of peoples. It is anti-racist and advocates a unity based on the recognition and celebration of our differences and similarities. Internationalism is a positive statement about the solidarity of all exploited and oppressed working people. Internationalism is also a tactical device to enable the revolutionary working class to overthrow capitalism. If capitalism is internationalist, so must be the working class. Given the wide differences in economic development between nations, it would be surprising to find revolution breaking out on a world scale simultaneously. No, far more likely will be revolution occurring within the national boundaries. Then, international solidarity becomes vital to defend the isolated revolution and to spread it onto a wider a wider scale.

## **Revolution**

We should not fall into the trap believing that revolutions must necessarily succumb to the forces of world imperialism. Just because the USA, for example, has a vast arsenal at its disposal does not mean that it can use it, or that if used, it can be effective. The example of the USA's inability to defeat the warlord Aideed in impoverished Somalia is an example of the limitations of armed intervention. So the young working class revolution, even if initially restricted to one or two countries has a good chance of success, if there is international working class support. Such support might include strikes, boycotts and agitation for revolution on 'home front'. Finally, internationalism is not only means to the end of revolution. It is an end in itself, in the sense that national barriers and parochialism will be broken down. There will be an international federation of peoples. For the first time the world will belong to no-one and everyone.

Long live the International!

# REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE

THE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE within the anarchist movement has long been controversial. The early anarchist movement associated with Michael Bakunin was openly insurrectionary and the anarchist communists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century regarded acts of terror against oppressors as perfectly legitimate. Kropotkin, Malatesta, Most and others enthused over acts of 'propaganda by the deed'. This idea stressed the importance of exemplary actions like strikes, occupations of public buildings etc, by small groups of revolutionaries that would ignite an already revolutionary situation. It very quickly turned into the idea of determined individuals carrying out individual attacks on kings, presidents and capitalists. Given the severe repression in many European and South American countries (for example France after the bloody crushing of the Paris Commune) and where open activity was difficult, this was understandable. The State, through the media, was able to so closely associate violence with anarchism that the two ideas became almost interchangeable in the public mind, to the detriment of the movement. Today there are many so-called anarchists who reject the whole revolutionary tradition. So, how should revolutionary anarchists approach the issue?

The first point to make is that it is states acting in defence of privilege and exploitation that practice violence on a large scale. The assassination of heads of state pales into insignificance in contrast to the normal, everyday actions of the state. In a real sense, States are organised violence. The armed forces, police, prisons and so on are institutional forms of violence used to protect the status quo. And the status quo is in itself violence for it means mass poverty, homelessness, poor health and despair. Should anyone question this legalised everyday terror they are met with the full repressive fist of the State.

## State Violence

And states are not content to inflict violence on their subject populations, but relish the opportunity to apply it to other peoples. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are perhaps the most horrific examples of this. Some leaders, such as Hitler and Stalin, excelled in murdering millions at home and abroad. Set against such horrific, mass violence committed by states, the bomb throwers and revolutionaries of history must be seen for what they were -heroic, if misguided people acting in self-defence against 'normal' state violence. With the exception of pacifists, most people accept self-defence as legitimate. To defend oneself or one's family from attack is readily understood and accepted. To defend an oppressed and exploited class (of which we ourselves are part) is just an extension of this principle. To use appropriate and measured violence against the very embodiment of violence which is the state, is no more than to launch a counter-attack. A violent insurrection or general strike must be seen in these terms - legitimate, justified and necessary self-defence against the monster of the capitalist state. Anyone who refuses to acknowledge this necessarily accepts the 'right' of the capitalist state to devour us.



A key point however, needs to be considered, namely that individual acts of violence, however well intentioned, justified by anger, poverty or despair are generally counter productive. Individual terror and group conspiracies are quite easily containable by the State. Rather than inspiring the masses to insurrection, they have generally appalled them, especially given the huge propaganda machines available to oppressors. Revolutionary mass violence is, however, a different thing if it expresses a determination to overthrow exploitation and oppression. And it takes various forms. The seizure of workplaces, banks and other property is inherently violent since it forcibly removes their possession from the owners. To not do so would be to capitulate to the system of exploitation. Anarchist revolutionaries defend every method used by the oppressed against the enemy from peaceful and legal protest up to and including violent uprising. Violence as a goal in itself is unjustified and indeed in revolutionary situations working class people have tended to shrink from its use. Not so the State, which if it secures victory in any particular phase of the class struggle, unleashes mass terror against its enemies, the people. Anyone doubting this should look at the aftermaths of the Paris Commune in the 1870s or the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

Revolutionary violence is the clear expression of the masses' refusal to continue any longer with the old ways. Sometimes, however, determined minorities, often inspired by Marxist-Leninism, have managed to seize control of such movements for their own ends. The October Revolution of 1917 led to the creation of one of the world's most brutal states. This mistake must not be repeated. Either the revolution is about smashing the State once and for all or it merely brings about another form of oppression

## **The State and Violence**

During the last ten years, the working class worldwide has been subject to ever-increasing attacks. Mass unemployment is now seen as 'normal' by those unaffected by it, inevitable or a product of 'development'. There has been a large redistribution wealth from the poor to the rich, leaving millions in a state of near destitution. Exceptionally regressive taxes have driven millions into a hand to mouth existence. State inspired racist violence is common in some parts of our cities. Given this context, is it surprising that we have had outbursts of near-insurrectionary violence? The Poll Tax riot in Trafalgar Square was a clear and welcome expression of class anger, as were the 'hit squads' which immobilised vehicles and stood up to the police during the lengthy miners' strike of 1984–85. When black people form self-defense groups against racist attacks, they are justified. When demonstrators retaliate against police provocations they are justified. When a whole class rises up against the State and Capitalism, it is justified.

When we read accounts of people suffering often horrible deaths in the struggle for life – butchered by war lords, starving in isolated settlements, dying of disease in urban shanties – perhaps those who condemn revolutionary violence will start to think more clearly. Capitalism and the State aren't going to go away or be reformed. They need to be destroyed, and unfortunately violence by the working class is almost certainly a necessary ingredient in this process.

# TERRORISM

ANARCHISTS HAVE LONG been associated with mindless violence in popular images. We can see *The Secret Agent* on television and often read of “riots lead by anarchists” in newspapers. So what have anarchists done to deserve this? The ruling class have always used ‘anarchist’ as a term of abuse, even before the anarchist movement arose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today’s rulers never miss an opportunity to slander us either. But anarchists are not entirely without blame. Towards the end of the last century many anarchists became impatient with the slow results of ‘propaganda by the word’ and developed the theory of ‘propaganda by the deed’. At first this was understood as the action of determined groups of revolutionaries by demonstrations, insurrections and other forms of collective direct action to ignite an already potentially revolutionary situation. But in later decades it became identified with individual assassinations. It was thought that if anarchist militants took an active lead and physically attacked members of the ruling class the working class would be inspired to revolution.

## Disaster

This theory was a total disaster. It left perhaps 20 prominent leaders (who were easily replaced) dead, and the whole anarchist movement severely damaged. Governments were given an excuse to pass repressive laws aimed at smashing the workers’ movement and to whip up anti-anarchist hysteria. The Russian anarchist communist Kropotkin, who had been a staunch defender of these tactics was one of the first to realise that they were mistaken. In a series of articles in 1890 he stated that: “One must be with the people, who no longer want isolated acts, but want men (sic) of action inside their ranks.” He went on to warn against: “the illusion that one can defeat the coalition of exploiters with a few pounds of explosives”. It is clear that as a means towards social revolution, terrorism is a non-starter. If this is the case, then why do terrorist groups exist today?

Obviously the obvious answer is that the terrorists of today are not interested in social revolution. Most are involved in ‘national liberation’ struggles, are marxist-leninists or both. They are usually authoritarian vanguardists of the worst kind. In their own terms these groups are occasionally successful, that is they ‘liberate’ a country or establish a new dictatorship called ‘socialism’. Anarchists should have no time for these would-be bosses of tomorrow. Yet terrorism still holds a fascination for some people who would consider themselves anarchists. These range from the cheerleaders, often seen sporting the tee-shirt of their favourite terrorist group, to the action men who think we should take up armed struggle now. Much of this can be explained by impatience and a lack of understanding of what social revolution means. To create an anarchist communist society working class people must destroy the current power structure and take power into their own hands. Terrorist groups do nothing to further this aim. Being a small armed elite they take on the role of a vanguard which will solve people’s problems for them. Anarchists should be able to see the flaws in any group which has the arrogance to think it can solve the world’s problems by itself. At the very least this can lead to further divisions within the

working class - between the terrorist leaders and the passive followers. Instead of encouraging people to think and act for themselves, terrorists seek to control struggles for their own ends. As Gerry Adams, the president of Sinn Fein said, "This is a special message for young people - no hijackings, no joyriding, no stone throwing at the Brits. If you want to do these things, there are organisations to do it for you." Even terrorist groups which claim to be anarchist cannot escape from their vanguardist nature. An 'anarchist' from the June 2<sup>nd</sup> Movement in West Germany argued "...analysis of imperialism tells us that the struggles no longer start in the metropolis, it's no longer a matter of the working class but what's needed is a vanguard in the metropolis that declares its solidarity, with the liberation movements of the Third World". This is hardly putting forward a libertarian communist position.

## **Our Role**

The work of revolutionaries is to clarify and co-ordinate struggles as a part of the working class. In non-revolutionary periods anarchist communists will be a conscious minority with 'the leadership of ideas'. We must always be pushing for struggles to go as far as possible and be linked up with other movements. However, we should never let ourselves over-estimate our own importance and we should never forget that when revolutions do break out revolutionary organisations are often taken by surprise. Another question which must be addressed when looking at terrorism is the use of violence. By planting bombs in public places terrorists again show their arrogance and a disturbing contempt for human life. In any bombing campaign whether by air force, car bomb or parcel bomb, there will inevitably be civilian casualties (or collateral damage if the bombing was done by an air force). Whilst this will provide no problem for the authoritarians of governments and terrorist governments in waiting, for revolutionaries this is unacceptable. We reject the random violence of terrorists but we are not pacifists either.

For us, the old violent tactics/non-violent tactics are falsely polarised. Many activities involving mass action do not involve violence, whilst others do. Large demonstrations and strikes can often turn to violence and we should accept the need for self- defense. Groups like the hit squads arising from the miners strike are genuine expressions of working class resistance. It would be foolish to sit in ivory towers of idealistic principles condemning this.

As anarchists we must constantly fight in all areas of life to advance the revolutionary process. At times we will need to defend ourselves against the violence of our enemies. But no matter how hard the struggle is, or how frustrated we are in failure, we must never forget old declaration: "the emancipation of workers must be brought about by the workers themselves". Elitist groups of any kind can only be a hindrance to this.

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