

# **Juxtaposing Anarchy**

**From Chaos to Cause**

Colin Jenkins

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# Contents

Pop Anarchy and Nihilism: Rebels <i>without</i> a Cause . . . . .	3
Liberal Enablers and the Right's Appropriation of Libertarianism . . . . .	5
Anarcho-Punk, Underground Hip Hop, and Conscious Chaos: Rebels <i>with</i> a Cause . .	7
Authentic Anarchism and Its Philosophical Roots . . . . .	8
Why Does this Matter? . . . . .	10

*Anarchy* is synonymous with chaos and disorder. It is a term that stands in direct contrast to the archetype of society we have become accustomed to: hierarchical, highly-structured, and authoritative. Because of this, it carries negative connotations. Merriam-Webster, the consensus source of meaning within the dominant paradigm, defines *anarchyas*: a situation of confusion and wild behavior in which the people in a country, group, organization, etc., are not controlled by rules or laws; or, a state of disorder due to absence or non-recognition of authority. The implications made in these definitions are clear - any absence of *authority*, *structure*, or *control* most surely amounts to *confusion*, *wild behavior*, and *disorder*. In other words, human beings are incapable of controlling themselves, maintaining order, and living peacefully amongst one another. So we are to believe.

Far removed from the general presentation of anarchy is *anarchism*, a political philosophy rich in intellectual and theoretical tradition. Again turning to Merriam-Webster, we are told that *anarchism* is: a political theory holding all forms of governmental authority to be unnecessary and undesirable and advocating a society based on voluntary cooperation and free association of individuals and groups. Even from within the dominant paradigm, we see a wide range of divergence between anarchism, which is presented strictly as an idea, and anarchy, which is presented as the real and absolute consequence (though hypothetical) of transforming this idea to praxis. Juxtaposing these terms, injecting historical perspective to their meaning, and realizing the differences between their usage within the modern lexicon and their philosophical substance should be a worthy endeavor, especially for anyone who feels that future attempts at shaping a more just society will be fueled by ideas, both from the past and present.

While comparing and contrasting the various ways in which anarchy is deployed, we recognize three arenas: 1) Popular culture, which embraces and markets the association of chaos, wild behavior, and disorder; 2) Corporate politics, which uses the term as a pejorative, mostly to describe dominant right-wing platforms like the Tea Party and US American libertarian movement; and 3) In activist and theoretical circles, where anarchism is understood as an authentic and legitimate political philosophy with roots firmly placed in the Enlightenment.

## **Pop Anarchy and Nihilism: Rebels *without a Cause***

The anti-authoritarian tendencies of anarchism are understandably attractive in a world that is overwhelmingly authoritative, intensely conformist, and socially restrictive. The conservative nature of American culture, which is notorious for repressing attitudes and beliefs that form outside of the dominant "white, Judeo-Christian" standard, begs for the existence of a thriving subculture that is based on rebellion, if only as an avenue of personal liberation and expression. The 1955 James Dean movie, *Rebel without a Cause*, offered a first glimpse into this nihilistic backlash against the deadening and soulless culture of conformity as it showcased the contradictory and often confusing nature of adolescence in white, middle-class suburbia.

On the heels of Dean was a baby-boomer revolution fueled by radical inquiry, hippie culture, bohemian lifestyles, and a "British Invasion." For the better part of a decade, the counterculture movement in the US that came to be known quite simply as "the '60s" boasted a wide array of meaningful causes, addressing everything from poverty to institutional racism and segregation to war. However, this brief period of revolutionary cause dissipated into a new and distinctly different counterculture through the 1970s and 80s, taking on a rebellious yet counterrevolution-

ary identity. In contrast to the existentialist nature of the 60s, which sought answers through philosophical exploration, the collective angst that developed in subsequent decades sought individual freedom through nihilism, self-destruction, and chronic apathy. Not giving a shit about detrimental traditions transformed into not giving a shit about anything. In turn, acts of defiance morphed from politically conscious and strategic opposition to oppressive structures to spiteful and self-destructive nothingness.

The revolutionary uprising of the 1960s, which had been stomped out by government suppression and maligned as an "excess of democracy," was effectively replaced by a reactionary insurrection bankrupt of any constructive analysis or productive goal. This nothingness was embraced by a significant counterculture that developed alongside the punk rock music scene, which flirted with anarchist politics before descending into an egoistic and narrow identity based in privilege. What followed was a brand of "pop anarchy" devoid any meaning beyond contrived images. Acts of rebellion were central, but a cause was neither constructed nor needed. The anarchist and revolutionary symbolism that screamed for meaning was reduced to shallow marketing schemes as remnants of legitimate angst were redirected into childish rants against parents, teachers, "the man," and "the system" - terms that often carried little meaning for those who used them. The exclusivity that developed made political organizing virtually impossible, and had an alienating effect on many. "Looking at the fact that most people who rear their heads at anarchist 'movement' events are roughly between 16-30 years old, with background influences of 'punk' or other 'alternative' persuasions," explains one former anarchist from the punk scene, "it is easy to understand why such 'movements' tend to alienate most people than interest them." A major problem that was exposed was demographics. "Punk primarily appealed to middle-class, staright white boys, who, thought they were 'too smart' for the rock music pushed by the corporations, still wanted to 'rock out.' It is also a culture that was associated with alienating oneself from the rest of society, often times in order to rebel against one's privileged background or parents." Because of this, "we have to admit that it was (and still is) exclusive."

By contrasting US punk culture of this time with its British counterpart, one could see the development of a counterculture that lacked revolutionary meaning or class context. As Neil Eriksen explains:

"The distinctions between US and British punk rock are based solidly on differences in the audience. In the US the counter-cultural character of punk is evident in the primary emphasis on style of dress and posturing. 'Middle class' youth can copy the style of the British punks and are afforded the economic and ideological space to make it a whole lifestyle, similar to the way the hippies dropped out, turned on and tuned in. It is primarily those who do not have to work for a living who can afford the outrageous blue, green and orange punk hair styles and gold safety pins. The working class generally cannot choose to go to work with orange hair. In England punk is much more complex, especially given the history of other sub-cultures such as the Mods, Rockers and Skinheads. British punks find in their sub-cultural expressions of music and attitudes, as well as styles, more of an organic indication of their experiences as under- or unemployed youth. In the US, punk has few organic working class roots, and it thus functions as a broad counter-cultural milieu that does not indict the system for lack of jobs, but tends toward nihilism and mindlessness."

The counterculture described above was a favorable, and almost inevitable, result of both appropriation from above and cooptation at the hands of capitalist profit. Revolutionary politics, in its authentic form, is not a profitable commodity. Instead, the radical roots of anarchist philoso-

phy, which are briefly described in the definition of "anarchism" provided by Merriam-Webster, serve as a threat to any society that possesses extreme divisions of power and wealth. The United States - with its hierarchical governmental structure, no-holds-barred corporate landscape, and extreme divisions between the wealthy and everyone else (20% of the population owns 90% of the wealth) is no exception. For this reason, anarchism has (historically) been appropriated by the dominant culture (which is shaped by this 20%), diluted to anarchy, and served to the masses in the form of entertainment. This process has led to "gradual appearances in mainstream culture over the course of several years, at times far removed from its political origin (described by Situationists as "recuperation"). These appearances typically connected it with anarchy and were intended as sensationalist marketing ploys, playing off the mainstream association of anarchy with chaos."

The most recent form of this appropriation has come in the popular television series, *Sons of Anarchy*, which depicts a California biker gang inundated with drama, drug abuse, senseless murders, gun-running, and gang activity. Despite glimpses and a few mentions of the fictional founder's manifesto, which included some scattered words by genuine anarchists like Emma Goldman and Pierre Joseph Proudhon, the show clearly chooses chaos and senseless, self-serving crime as its theme. The pinnacle of this appropriation, and ignorance of the rich history of philosophical anarchism, concludes with reviews that refer to one of the show's main characters, a ruthless, murderous, and power-hungry leader by the name of Clay Morrow, as a "true anarchist."

## **Liberal Enablers and the Right's Appropriation of Libertarianism**

In the midst of the US government shutdown in October of 2013, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid took to the Senate floor to criticize the move. "We have a situation where we have a good day with the anarchists," Reid said. "Why? Because the government is closed." Reid's comment was meant as a jab to the Republican Party, which was largely responsible for allowing the shutdown to take place, purely as a political ploy. A few days later, Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren referred to "anarchist tirades" and "thinly veiled calls for anarchy in Washington" coming from Tea Party members in the House as the impetus for the shutdown. Warren even went as far as equating anarchists with "pessimists and ideologues whose motto is, 'I've got mine, the rest of you are on your own,' while ironically tying in neoliberal deregulation that "tolerates dangerous drugs, unsafe meat, dirty air, or toxic mortgages," as an "anarchists' dream."

"Anarchy" has maintained its status as a pejorative in the modern American liberal lexicon, but not by choice. Borrowing from the nihilism of pop anarchy, it embraces misconceptions, ignores historical roots, and guts the term of genuine meaning. Considering that such rhetoric is coming from folks who have advanced degrees in political science, careers as political pundits, and a working knowledge of history, it can only be explained as calculated fear-mongering. The fact of the matter is that the Republican Party is just as "statist" as the Democratic Party, if only in different ways. And while the approach of political sects like the Tea Party and US American "libertarian" movements present a less-statist platform than their counterparts from within the establishment, their philosophical make-ups (if you can even call them that) include a blatant disregard for the public at-large, an underlying racism that is dangerously oppressive, a love affair with capitalism, a childish refusal to recognize needs outside of privileged interests, a fanatical

support for gun rights, and a narrow-minded obsession with protecting private property and personal wealth - beliefs that are more in line with the self-absorbed, reactionary nature of fascism than with the revolutionary, "cooperative individualism" of anarchism. Ultimately, the Tea Party, much like the US American "libertarian" movement, is focused on one goal: protecting an embedded array of privilege and maintaining the status quo; and the means to their end (at least, theoretically) is the coercive power structure of the market, as opposed to that of the state. If and only when the market hierarchy is threatened by, say, a popular uprising, a workers strike, or a movement for civil rights, this brand of "libertarian" views the state - in the form of domestic police and military forces - as a necessary component. In other words, these so-called "anarchists" are really nothing of the sort. Instead, they are more than willing to use state power to uphold historically-based inequities related to wealth accumulation, racism, and class division.

If the cheap political jabs used by liberals were packed with historical context, they could be closer to the truth. However, this would defeat the purpose. Parts of the right-wing have, in fact, appropriated and twisted anarchist philosophy, mostly through a concerted effort to adopt an ahistorical version of "libertarianism." In his "anarcho-capitalist" manifesto, *Betrayal of the American Right*, Murray Rothbard explained this intent:

"One gratifying aspect of our rise to some prominence is that, for the first time in my memory, we, 'our side,' had captured a crucial word from the enemy. Other words, such as 'liberal,' had been originally identified with laissez-faire libertarians, but had been captured by left-wing statists, forcing us in the 1940s to call ourselves rather feebly 'true' or 'classical' liberals. 'Libertarians,' in contrast, had long been simply a polite word for left-wing anarchist; that is for anti-private property anarchists, either of the communist or syndicalist variety. But now we had taken it over, and more properly from the view of etymology; since we were proponents of individual liberty and therefore of the individual's right to his property."

Of course, like all others who claim this contradictory title of anarcho-capitalist, Rothbard either failed to recognize "how property results in similar social relations and restrictions in liberty as the state," or simply believed that "liberty" was synonymous with feudalistic ideals. As one anarchist (of the authentic variety) writer laments, the thought process of this faux-anarchism is that a "capitalist or landlord restricting the freedom of their wage-workers and tenants" is ok, but any such restrictions from "the state" is not. "It's an oddity that in the United States, the main current of libertarian thought has been twisted and inverted into a kind of monstrous stepchild," explains Nathan Schneider. "Rather than seeking an end to all forms of oppression, our libertarians want to do away with only the government kind, leaving the rest of us vulnerable to the forces of corporate greed, racial discrimination, and environmental destruction."

Since the Democratic Party's use of the term borrows from the simplistic, nihilistic version of "pop anarchy," rather than the complex, philosophical version of anarchism, it becomes useful within the modern political arena. The true right-wing appropriation of anarchism as noted by Rothbard, which is fabricated in its own right, becomes buried under the fear-mongering and falsely implied association by the likes of Reid and Warren. Historically, this same type of fear-mongering has allowed for fascist scapegoating (Reichstag Fire), capitalist scapegoating (Haymarket Affair), and unlawful state executions (Sacco and Vanzetti), all designed to exploit widespread ignorance regarding anarchist beliefs and prevent authentic libertarian movements from spreading through the populace. "The figure of the anarchist has long dominated our national imagination," explains Heather Gautney. "It's a word that conjures up the lawless, the nihilistic and even the violent. It's the image Senators Reid and Warren invoked in their talk-

ing points against the Republicans.” It’s also an image devoid any real meaning. By removing its substance and demonizing its association, the establishment wins.

## **Anarcho-Punk, Underground Hip Hop, and Conscious Chaos: Rebels *with* a Cause**

While “pop anarchy” took over much of the American punk scene in the ’70s and ’80s, it was only part of the story. Punk culture still served what Henry Rollins once succinctly described as “the perfect expression of postmodern angst in a decadent society,” creating an outlet for rebellious urges seeping from the dominant culture. It also served as a catalyst for pockets of revolutionary politics. When done right, it was the perfect combination of expression and meaning. The hard, edgy, and chaotic sounds spilling from the music represented a form of liberation that was desperately needed, while the lyrics roared against the establishment and aimed at deadening conformity and the music industry’s increasingly corporatized and cookie-cutter production value. The UK provided an example of this perfection when it birthed anarcho-punk.

“From the numerous situationist slogans that graced the lyrics of early punk bands, to the proliferation of anarcho-punk bands such as Crass and Conflict in the early eighties, punk rock as a subculture has had a unique history of having a strong relationship with explicitly anarchist and anti-capitalist political content over the years,” explains an anonymous Colours of Resistance blogger . “Many anarchists today, including myself, are by-products of punk rock, where most become politicized from being exposed to angry, passionate lyrics of anarcho-punk bands, “do-it-yourself” zines, and countless other sources of information that are circulated within the underground punk distribution networks. Some are introduced to punk through the introduction to the anarchist social circles. Regardless of which comes first, the correlation between the punk scene and the anarchist scene is hard to miss, especially at most anarchist gatherings and conferences.”

Within the anarcho-punk movement, “the possibilities for advances in popular culture in the dissolution of capitalist hegemony and in building working class hegemony” began to surface. “The fact that punk rock validated political themes in popular music once again,” Eriksen suggests, “opened the field” for the left libertarian movements. As an example, punk initiatives like “Rock Against Racism were able to sponsor Carnivals with the Anti-Nazi League drawing thousands of people and many popular bands to rally against racism and fascism” and “openly socialist bands like the Gang of Four were taken seriously by mainstream rock critics and record companies, and thereby were able to reach a broad audience with progressive entertainment.”

Punk ideologies that arose from this era touched on concepts like anti-establishment, equality, freedom, anti-authoritarianism, individualism, direct action, free thought, and non-conformity - many ideas that are synonymous with historical-anarchist thought. This social consciousness naturally led to activism, and specifically, acts of direct action, protests, boycotts, and squatting. These elements represented authentic anarchist philosophy and served as a counter to nihilistic and empty “pop anarchy,” while politicizing many.

Another form of “rebellion with a cause” came from American hip-hop and rap. The rise of hip-hop in the US paralleled that of the punk scene, and shared many of the same revolutionary tendencies. While not explicitly anarchist, hip-hop took on an identity that mirrored authentic anarchist philosophy. Its anti-authoritarian nature was far from nihilistic, but rather survivalist;

born in response to centuries of racial subjugation, economic strangulation, and violent oppression at the hands of domestic police forces. Hip-hop's birthplace, the Bronx (NYC), characterized its development. "Heavily influenced by the economically and socially oppressed ghettos, along with the echoes of the last generation's movements for liberation and the street gangs that filled in the void they left," Derek Ide tells us, "the South Bronx provided the perfect matrix in which marginalized youth could find a way to articulate the story of their own lives and the world around them. In this historically unique context, a culture would be created through an organic explosion of the pent-up, creative energies of America's forgotten youth. It was a culture that would reach every corner of the world in only a couple decades.."

In the end, hip-hop and gangsta rap provided endless displays of socially-conscious and revolutionary tracks throughout the '80s and '90s, and combined with the punk scene to construct a form of "conscious chaos" that provided valuable social and cultural analyses as well as revolutionary goals that sought to establish a more just world. These counter-cultural movements represented an important about-turn from the contrived nihilism and "pop anarchy" that had surfaced in response to the "excess of democracy" in the '60s, and displayed elements that echoed authentic anarchism, as a revolutionary libertarian philosophy.

## **Authentic Anarchism and Its Philosophical Roots**

The roots of Anarchism, as a school of thought, are firmly placed in the Age of Enlightenment and, specifically, within two major themes stemming from that period: liberalism and socialism. In a sea of definitions, one of the most concise and encompassing is offered by Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt in their 2009 book, "Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism." In it, they describe anarchism as "a revolutionary and libertarian socialist doctrine" that "advocates individual freedom through a free society" and "aims to create a democratic, egalitarian, and stateless socialist order through an international and internationalist social revolution, abolishing capitalism, landlordism, and the state."<sup>1</sup>

Anarchism's roots in the Enlightenment are undeniable. From Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "Discourse on Inequality" to Wilhelm von Humboldt's "The Limits of State Action," the libertarian strain born of this time served as the precursor to the anarchist thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Their similarities are found in a philosophical examination of social inequities like personal wealth, private property, political power, and all forms of authority established within human societies - elements that are heavily scrutinized by anarchists. However, despite these roots, Schmidt and van der Walt tell us that anarchism should be considered "a relatively recent phenomenon" that emerged specifically "from the 1860s onward within the context of the modern working-class and socialist movement, within the womb of the First International."<sup>2</sup> For this reason, anarchism can most aptly be described as "socialism from below." In fact, the demarcation between enlightenment philosophy and anarchist thought is generally found in their distinct reactions to hierarchies created by systems of monarchy, feudalism, and theocracy (enlightenment) and hierarchies created by the exploitative nature of capitalism and the modern liberal, democratic state (anarchism).

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<sup>1</sup> Schmidt, Michael & van der Walt, Lucien. Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism. AK Press, 2009, p. 33

<sup>2</sup> Schmidt & van der Walt, p. 34



The development and separation of anarchism from the Enlightenment was made clear by prominent anarchist thinkers at and around the turn of the 20th century. In the years following the Paris Commune, Russian revolutionary anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, expressed his disgust with the idea of a "purely formal liberty conceded, measured out and regulated by the State, an eternal lie which in reality represents nothing more than the privilege of some founded on the slavery of the rest," and "the shabby and fictitious liberty extolled by the School of J-J Rousseau and the other schools of bourgeois liberalism, which considers the would-be rights of all men, represented by the State which limits the rights of each - an idea that leads inevitably to the reduction of the rights of each to zero."<sup>3</sup> A few decades later, in a critique of liberalism, Peter Kropotkin denounced the aim of all so-called "superior civilizations," which was "not to permit all members of the community to develop in a normal way," but rather "to permit certain, better-endowed individuals fully to develop, even at the cost of the happiness and the very existence of the mass of mankind." This separation had much to do with the newly developed social constraints stemming from capitalism. As Noam Chomsky explains, "It is true that classical libertarian thought is opposed to state intervention in social life, as a consequence of deeper assumptions about the human need for liberty, diversity, and free association..." however, "on the same assumptions, capitalist relations of production, wage labor, competitiveness, and the ideology of 'possessive individualism' all must be regarded as fundamentally antihuman" as well. For this reason, he suggests, "libertarian socialism is properly regarded as the inheritor of the liberal ideals of the Enlightenment," while it also embraces its own identity through the inclusion of a class analysis and critique of the coercive structures stemming from the capitalist hierarchy.<sup>4</sup>

The socialist nature of anarchism represents a fundamental current in both its thought and process, yet is often overlooked by many who claim to be anarchists, especially in the United States. This misunderstanding is caused by both pro-market (and even pro-capitalist) "libertarian" movements that are ahistorical and seemingly blind to the authoritative structures of modern, industrial capitalism, as well as by the abovementioned "pop anarchy" phenomenon and "liberal enabling" that falsely limit anarchism to a vague and unsophisticated "anti-government" stance. Superficial dualities that have captured consensus thought, most notably that of "collectivism vs. individualism," are also largely responsible for this misinterpretation. Because of this, the virtual disappearance of class analysis from modern libertarian thought in the United States not only represents a significant departure from nearly two centuries of libertarianism, but also neglects to address a highly-authoritative and hierarchical private structure that has long surpassed its governmental counterpart. Schmidt and van der Walt explain the importance of rejecting "pop anarchy" stereotypes and maintaining this class analysis within anarchist thought:

"For anarchists, individual freedom is the highest good, and individuality is valuable in itself, but such freedom can only be achieved within and through a new type of society. Contending that a class system prevents the full development of individuality, anarchists advocate class struggle from below to create a better world. In this ideal new order, individual freedom will be harmonised with communal obligations through cooperation, democratic decision-making, and social and economic equality. Anarchism rejects the state as a centralised structure of domination and an instrument of class rule, not simply because it constrains the individual or because anar-

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<sup>3</sup> Guerin, Daniel. "Anarchism: From Theory to Practice." Monthly Review Press, 1970. Taken from the Preface by Noam Chomsky.

<sup>4</sup> Chomsky on Anarchism, selected and edited by Barry Pateman. AK Press: 2005, p. 122-123

chists dislike regulations. On the contrary, anarchists believe rights arise from the fulfilment of obligations to society and that there is a place for a certain amount of legitimate coercive power, if derived from collective and democratic decision making.

The practice of defining anarchism simply as hostility to the state has a further consequence: that a range of quite different and often contradictory ideas and movements get conflated. By defining anarchism more narrowly, however, we are able to bring its key ideas into a sharper focus, lay the basis for our examination of the main debates in the broad anarchist tradition in subsequent chapters, and see what ideas are relevant to current struggles against neoliberalism.<sup>5</sup>

When considering and rejecting both public and private forms of restriction, the most fundamental element of authentic anarchism clearly becomes cooperation. This theme was thoroughly established by Kropotkin in his 1902 classic, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, in which he pointed to "the practice of mutual aid, which we can retrace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support not mutual struggle - has had the leading part. In its wide extension, even at the present time, we also see the best guarantee of a still loftier evolution of our race." This theme was echoed by Rudolf Rocker in his 1938 treatise on *Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Said Rocker, "Anarchism is a definite intellectual current in the life of our time, whose adherents advocate the abolition of economic monopolies and of all political and social coercive institutions within society" while calling on "a free association of all productive forces based upon cooperative labor" to replace "the present capitalistic economic order."<sup>6</sup>

## Why Does this Matter?

The importance of Anarchist theory lies in its critique of hierarchies and the uneven distribution of power emanating from such. This makes this school of thought an important component as we move forward in attempting to address the pervasive ills of society, whether coming from the state or corporate structures that tower over us. The mere questioning of these "authorities" is crucial in itself. As Chomsky tells us:

"... any structure of hierarchy and authority carries a heavy burden of justification, whether it involves personal relations or a large social order. If it cannot bear that burden - sometimes it can - then it is illegitimate and should be dismantled. When honestly posed and squarely faced, that challenge can rarely be sustained. Genuine libertarians have their work cut out for them."<sup>7</sup>

While many socialist-oriented strains incorporate this same analysis, some do not. Essentially, regarding the formation of class-consciousness, anarchist theory of all varieties (syndicalism, mutualism, communism, etc.) act as ideal compliments to historically strong currents of Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, and Trotskyism, and should be included within all such theoretical considerations. When transforming theory to praxis, anarchism's inclusion of worker collectivization in the form of labor or trade unions prove valuable in this regard. In his treatise on *Syndicalism*, Rocker made a compelling argument for the usefulness of this brand of anarchism as a component to working-class emancipation. For the Anarcho-Syndicalists," says Rocker, "the trade

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<sup>5</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, p. 33

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*, 6th edition. AK Press, 2004. P. 1

<sup>7</sup> Chomsky on *Anarchism*, p. 192.

union is by no means a mere transitory phenomenon bound up with the duration of capitalist society, it is the germ of the socialist economy of the future, the elementary school of socialism in general." He continues, "Every new social structure makes organs for itself in the body of the old organism. Without this preliminary, any social evolution is unthinkable. Even revolutions can only develop and mature the germs which already exist and have made their way into the consciousness of men (and presumably, women); they cannot themselves create these germs or generate new worlds out of nothing."<sup>8</sup>

Putting this philosophy into action is still of utmost importance. Creating a brand that is palatable and accessible to the working-class majority, without sacrificing its revolutionary tone and message, is also crucial. In his 2013 book, "Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street," Mark Bray stresses the importance of deploying a practical anarchism which avoids the esoteric idealism that so many genuine and well-intentioned anarchists get bogged down in. This pragmatic approach is perhaps most important when attempting to relay information via short interviews and sound bites. Bray points to three specific lessons he learned while interacting with mainstream media during his time at Zuccotti Park:

"First, I learned the value of presenting my revolutionary ideas in an accessible format. How I dress, the words I choose, and how I articulate them affect how I am received, so if my primary goal is to convince people of what I am saying, then it's often useful to shed my "inessential weirdness." Second, I realized the usefulness of letting tangible examples sketch the outline of my ideas without encumbering them with explicit ideological baggage. Finally, I concluded that the importance that Americans place on the electoral system dictates that any systematic critique should start with the corporate nature of both parties. Like it or not, that's where most people are at in terms of their political framework, so if you skip past the candidates to alternative institutions, for example, without convincing them of the bankrupt nature of the electoral system, you'll lose them."<sup>9</sup>

Essentially, anarchism is what democracy is supposed to be - self-governance. In this sense, anyone even remotely involved in the Occupy movement had the privilege, likely for the first time in their lives, to truly witness democracy (anarchism) in action. "This is not the first time a movement based on fundamentally anarchist principles - direct action, direct democracy, a rejection of existing political institutions and attempt to create alternative ones - has cropped up in the US," explains David Graeber. "The civil rights movement (at least, its more radical branches), the anti-nuclear movement, the global justice movement ... all took similar directions." And, in a country where a large majority of citizens have given up on and/or no longer believe in their representatives, a little democracy may be exactly what we need, even if it's not what our white, wealthy, slave-owning "founding fathers" wanted. "Most (of the founding fathers) defined 'democracy' as collective self-governance by popular assemblies, and as such, they were dead set against it, arguing it would be prejudicial against the interests of minorities (the particular minority that was had in mind here being the rich)," Graeber tells us. "They only came to redefine their own republic - modeled not on Athens, but on Rome - as a 'democracy' because ordinary Americans seemed to like the word so much."

In our inevitable and necessary escape from the faux democracy of America's colonists and founders, anarchist thought will undoubtedly play a role. It is, after all, the only school of thought

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<sup>8</sup> Rucker, P. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Bray, *Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street*. Zero Books, 2013.

that can be described as authentic, class-based libertarianism. Its foundation is the reasonable expectation that all structures of dominance, authority, and hierarchy must justify themselves; and, if they cannot, they must be dismantled.

This covers ALL coercive institutions - not only governments, the state, police, and military, but also cultural phenomena like patriarchy, racism, and white supremacy, and most importantly, economic systems like capitalism. Unlike modern forms of "libertarianism" in the US, which ignore racist structures and the historical formations behind them, and falsely view the labor-capital relationship inherent in capitalism as a "choice," authentic Anarchism correctly views such elements as coercive and forced; and seeks to dismantle them in order to move forward with constructing a society based on free association, where all human beings have a healthy degree of control over their lives, families, and communities.

Contrary to consensus thought (propaganda), such as those rooted in "rugged individualism" and "American exceptionalism," there is a collective and cooperative nature to true liberty. We simply cannot gain control over our lives until we learn to respect the lives of all others. This is the essence of community. And we cannot begin to do this until we deconstruct illegitimate hierarchies of wealth and power, which have been constructed through illegal and immoral means over the course of centuries. Recognizing these structures and realizing that they are NOT legitimate, and therefore do not deserve to exist, is the first step in this process. Embracing contributions from this school of thought is crucial in this regard.

Fundamentally, Anarchism is a working-class ideology. Occupy Wall Street was largely influenced by it. Workers' co-ops are largely influenced by it. Any action that attempts to establish free association within society can learn much from it. Its foundational requirement of organic human cooperation and peaceful co-existence has been tried and tested throughout history - from hunter-gatherer societies across the world to Native American communities to the Paris Commune to revolutionary Catalonia to Chiapas. It provides a philosophical foundation - not a rigid blueprint - that allows for limitless potential in attempting to solve our problems, collectively, while trying to carve out a meaningful human experience for everyone. It may not provide all answers, or even most, but its foundation is worthy of building from, or at least considering. Its true value is found in its inclusion of historical formations as well as its role as a catalyst for new ideas and action - something we desperately need, moving forward.

Notes

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From Chaos to Cause  
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