Why "Social" Anarchism?

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You may have wondered why I keep referring to *social* anarchism rather than just anarchism when I talk about the subject. Social anarchism is in fact what most who understand anarchism are referring to when they talk about "anarchism" without another word in front of or after it.

It is an ethical-political traditional which (contrary to popular belief) does not seek chaos or disorder, but the "flattening" of social, political, and economic power relations: dissolving hierarchical authority into *horizontal power*, so that people are able to govern themselves as free equals rather than having to take orders from centralised institutions of control and subordination. So, as a process, if focuses on the continual empowerment of the disempowered, inclusion of the excluded, and the decentralisation of power and authority.

It seeks (in the long term) a directly-democratic and non-hierarchical society characterised by:

- Individual autonomy

- Voluntary association.

- A ethos of communal individuality rather than either rugged individualism or smothering collectivism, balancing the personal and social instincts.

- The dissolution of all forms of oppressive social hierarchy and domination: racism, sexism, queerphobia, ableism, and the domination of nature.

- A cooperative economy of the commons premised on workplace self-management; beyond the profit motive, market capitalism, and central planning by the state.

- And the decentralisation of government into voluntary confederations of a directly-democratic, self-governing communities.

As a tradition, social anarchism first emerged out of the wider socialist movement in the 1860s, with most of its foundational traits being developed within the First International out of the ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, only taken in a more anti-authoritarian direction by figures such as Mikhail Bakunin and James Guillaume, and later in a more communalistic direction by Peter Kropotkin, Élisée Reclus, and Emma Goldman. It has been regarded by many as a confluence of the best of (classical) liberalism and (democratic) socialism, with its economics being described as

libertarian socialism, in constrast to the authoritarian state socialism of most Marxist movements and to paternalistic social democracy as it exists on most of the liberal left. It also contrasts with the so-called "libertarianism" of the neoliberal right, a term they appropriated from social anarchists in the mid 20th century.

It is by far the majority tendency among those who describe themselves as anarchists and to many it is even considered the *only* form of anarchism, and it's followers the sole legitimate users of the label.

So if it's the primary (or even only) form of anarchism anyway, why the need for the adjective "social"?

Well, there are three reasons:

1. Specificity

There are countless ideologies which slap the prefix "anarcho-" onto themselves and whose adherents describe themselves as "anarchists": anarcho-capitalists, "post-left" anarchists, anarcho-primitivists, market anarchists, national-anarchists, anarcho-monarchists (yes, really).

Specifying a more particular tradition helps reorient things and disassociates one's ideas/practices from every silly belief-system which self-identifies with the a-word.

2. Accessibility

The word "anarchist" is quite loaded and carries with it a whole heap of stereotypes and myths. Calling yourself an anarchist to someone uninitiated with anarchist theory is likely to make them think you're insane, or perhaps just immature.

Social anarchism on the other hand is something they're at least likely to Google before dismissing you as some kind of nutter.

3. Definition

Adding the word social helps emphasise the positive features of the philosophy rather than just its oppositional aspects. The very etymology of the word anarchism means "without/against rulership". So the term anarchism by itself refers to what it's against rather than what it's for.

Social however implies communality, popular order, and the connections between individuals. So putting them together the two terms – social anarchism – denote "society without rulers" and "sociality against rulership"; implying that authentic human sociability itself is contrary to the logic of hierarchical power.

The term itself isn't even new. It first emerged in the late 19th century as a way to distinguish the anarchist mainstream from various individualist or egoist strains which promoted a kind of anti-social worldview opposed to building popular movements and in many cases content to merely live freely within the capitalist state system rather than doing anything to get rid of it.

So do try to make the term more popular if you can. There's at least a slightly better chance that more people will google it, learning what real anarchism is all about, rather than dismissing it out of hand as mindless chaos or black-clad teenagers hurling Molotov cocktails and getting smashy-smashy with shop windows.

For a world beyond hierarchy and domination; for freedom, equality, and solidarity; for Social Anarchism.