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Anarchism, Anarchy, Anarchists

David Wieck

1953 (originally 1951)

Introduction by Robert Graham

The Free Society Group of Chicago was an anarchist group founded in 1923 in the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution, when most radicals went over to the Soviet camp. Two of its best known members were Gregory Maksimov and Sam Dolgoff. They helped to keep anarchist ideas alive at a time when anarchist ideas and movements were being repressed virtually everywhere. In 1951, the Group published a pamphlet, *The World Scene From the Libertarian Point of View*, an anarchist assessment of the human prospect in light of the mass murder of the Second World War, the atomic bomb, the Cold War and the Korean War. For some, the human prospect was bleak. Others held out hope for the reemergence of a social libertarian, anarchist approach regarding the many crises and problems then facing humanity. One of those holding out hope for the present and the future was David Thoreau Wieck (1921–1997), an American anarchist, war resister and editor of one of the best post-war anarchist journals, *Resistance*. In Volume Two of *Anarchism: A Documentary History*

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Resistance, August, 1953

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of Libertarian Ideas, I included a piece by David Wieck on the realization of freedom, from the August 1953 issue of Resistance. Here I reproduce his still timely contribution to The World Scene From the Libertarian Point of View. Isn't it time someone published a collection of Wieck's anarchist writings?

ANARCHISM, ANARCHY, ANARCHISTS

David Wieck, 1951

Let us identify and locate ourselves, the Anarchists.

I shall speak, necessarily, of Anarchists as I understand Anarchists, Anarchism as I understand it.

We are people who have values, aims, and methods radically different from the dominant. Our comradeship is neither in doctrine nor daily program; on these we easily disagree, rather this: we face our nature, affirm life, stubbornly insist on the real and basic needs; and we understand that these are possible only as we are free from external oppression (authority as violence) and internal oppression (authority within us). We are people who insist upon, and affirm, liberty from authority, and freedom within the individual; we are those who assert (and follow our logic) that these ends of freedom and liberty can be achieved only by directness: freedom through freedom, liberty through liberty.

This last century, our oppressors, problems, goals, are specific in this way: the centralized political State, the dominant capitalist-military- political ruling class, an increasingly complex array of institutions binding these together, and the social organization (and ourselves) to them; holding society in tension and violence of world war following world war, concentration camps and extermination camps of indifferent flags and ideologies; most significantly in the systematic, ruthless, even purposeless, destruction of the principle of life. (The ideally adapted human today is composed, as it were, of a small small core of living substance, surrounded by a many times

larger mass of deadness, confusion, violence; covered completely by a hard thin shell of customs, habits, and compulsions that constitute the daily economic rituals, the culture, civilization: this is the basic disaster; the great bombs are consistent, but ironically superfluous.)

Living so: burdened, threatened, oppressed, exploited, enslaved, regimented, killed, and left (living) for dead: for a century we have risen in rebellion, adamant in disobedience, joined as friends and neighbours in solidarity and community; this handful of Anarchists; believing firmly that this need not be, we need not live so, will be free.

Our definition in space and time becomes more exact now: the day after a century of unmitigated disasters to movement, comrades, friends, strangers; a handful still, seemingly forced to choose between illusion and despair; on the day before other atomic facts, amid the potent demonstrations of giant nation-states planning our (incidental) extermination. And, seemingly without reluctance, our neighbours perform the necessary labour: mass homicide, slavery, regimentation, and the rest.

These facts, the lack of even individual refuge for survival alive, the unimpassioned murderings by our neighbours—are these all there is? Are we to withdraw to museums and study histories of the decay of civilizations—or make peace, pact or armistice, so as to die a little later, in greater safety? (but not the safety of our selves). Or is it so, that there is work to do, joyful and rewarding work, and we may think and hope without illusion or despair?

There is this work, this illusionless, affirming thought, but it is easier not to see and do it.

Assume a worst: that it were so (if it were so), for example, that our neighbours, even our friends (our enemies cannot disappoint us as our friends can), are, forever will be, as they are (which we know too well); or, the same thing, the prevailing social orders are immutable in their central principle of slavery: were this really so (some argue) our Anarchism has no meaning, we ought to become

one with the ideals and acts of the society and its population. No! Not so that a thing is better for being inevitable; not so that our happiness and health would no longer depend on rejection of this social machine, its inhuman demands, its suffocating terms: so, on the other hand, that a man must be as free as he can, make a revolution of indefinite (most possible) extension.

Were it really so—some argue this, too—that the mass is by nature docile, unrebelling, must be led and herded, it then does not follow that we should lead, herd and slaughter them into our (former!) utopia. Even so, when we observe the State's seeming omnipotence, we cannot become its slaves, masters, or loyal opposition; again we protect ourselves, shelter our friends, undermine it in its locus of power (minds of subjects).

Or assume that no alternative to destruction can be: Could we then be “realists,” as we are bidden to be, argue the relative merits of a bomb now or two years from now; support (that is, help create) a war, be its soldiers, fabricate its weapons? No! If our belief is in life, community, and freedom, No! Not by participating in a lesser evil (killing strangers, to the gain of our oppressors), but by rejecting all the evils will we mitigate them all. (And I deny that we will not one day abolish them!)

But let us not give these people the best of the argument a moment more! We are learning; there is work to be done; we know (our friends disappoint us; but not always) from day to day that there is ability for another life in us, our neighbours, strangers.

Experience and our science tell us that the nature of man is not such as slavery causes to appear.

If, less than of old, we have faith in the virtue of propaganda, dramatic insurrections, quick revolution; less than of old, in the inevitability of mass anarchic rebellion to economic misery; if so, we have learned much of the power of direct action, immediate action, personal action, group action, learning that what is revolutionary in time of revolution is not so much street barricades but the immediate revolutionary act: as the Spanish anarchists taught us, a

village or a factory is enough. We have learned that as groups living the ethics and meaning of Anarchism we create an Anarchist community in and as our movement, and demonstrate by this new society our ideas, and their practicality. We have learned that as individuals we do most by this same living of ethics and meaning of Anarchism, creating a new environment for our non-Anarchist friends, creating the new society, a new life.

By daily acts of life we are more deeply angered, gifted with hatred at a kind of life (as it is); more deeply knowing, in our hearts, that we must live differently; more earnestly searching in each direction our strength allows us, ways and instruments and friends and comrades in a struggle which must have this form: the creation of new life, or continuing death.

More urgent work, a finer goal, labour more consonant with our persons and ideas, surely we cannot imagine. To those who wish immediate, simple, political answers to atomic problems, we would seem to give no answer: but it is by plotting the utilitarian murder of a million strangers in a far-off city that one can intervene in this politics, guide the hands of States. We select, for our goals, other weapons: the strong desires and dreams of man, the strength and joy and magic of life. We can do this.