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Youth Liberation

(I)An-ok Ta Chai

2004

You can tell a great deal about a society if you look at how they treat their children and their elderly. In our society both children and the elderly are often disconnected from other age groups and forced into institutional settings; schools for children and nursing homes for the elderly. Children are brainwashed into the system and the elderly are forgotten and faded out once their ability to produce and spend capital wanes.

It is because of this that I believe in radical youth liberation. Some people have a hard time fully understanding this. “How does ageism compare to the brutalities of imperialism/capitalism/the state?” they ask me. “Ageism”, the mere prejudice and discrimination of people based on their age, may not be as big a problem as capitalism/the state, I agree. To look at youth liberation in terms of just “ageism” is to miss the point. “Gerontocracy”, or, the ongoing

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and systemic domination of kids¹ by those older than them is my focus.

One important thing to always keep in mind is that kids are human beings, just like the rest of us. People do not suddenly become human when they turn a certain age – they are born that way. With this being the case, kids have the inherent human ability to learn, grow, develop and direct their own lives as they see fit, just like anybody else. Kids do not understand everything, kids make mistakes, and kids need help and support but all of this can be said of every human being.

The often unspoken notion that adults are omniscient, infallible and not dependent upon the help and support of others while kids are very much the opposite is a distortion of reality necessary to construct the social hierarchy of adults over kids. This all becomes very apparent if one reflects on how a proposition to systematically dominate people who are physically ill, injured, ignorant, ill informed, or intoxicated (all of which are also temporary conditions) would be universally laughed at and dismissed.

With this being the case, let's call it like it is – kids are slaves in this society. Kids cannot freely disassociate without fear of their parents or the state somehow hunting them down and dragging them back. Kids are forced to go to concentration camps (we call them “schools”). Kids cannot deny or receive medical care at their own will – an adult has to decide for them. Kids do not have ultimate say over their own time, bodies, activities, behaviors and choices – some parental or other adult figure has to determine it for them. This is slavery, pure, systemic, out-right slavery. It is slavery

¹ I use the word “kids” in this article because “young people” can mean people over the age of 18, a group of people which do experience prejudice and discrimination but does not have to deal with the out-right slavery that those under 18 face. I do not use “children”, because I see that word as being an equivalent to the N-word in this context. “Childish”, “child-like”, etc. usually have very negative or derogatory connotations. “Kids”, however, usually refers to those under 18 and has positive connotations; hence, I use that word here.

based upon the widespread use of violence, the threat of violence, and by emotional manipulation, intimidation and brainwashing.

The spirits of kids are continually beaten down by authority, particularly adult authority, in order to crush their wills, to break them of their individuality, spontaneity, creativity, curiosity and comfort with their own autonomy. Kids are constantly faced with various kinds of parental authorities, school authorities, state institutions, and a mass culture all intended to mold them, to get them to jump on command, take orders, and do what they're told.

As I see it, the domination of kids is not just a horror because of the sheer lack of autonomy, respect and dignity that all these unique young human beings experience, it is also an integral part of the greater social system of domination, control and alienation – civilization itself. The domination of kids breaks the wills of people and inserts authoritarian programming so that they can later reproduce institutions such as the state, capitalism and gerontocracy when they get older themselves.

The domination of kids contains within it the very same fundamental dynamics of authority and control that as anarchists, we should actively be opposing. The very act of being subservient, the very act of compliance and submission, the very act of rule and bossing are all at play within the dichotomy of “parental authority figure” and “child”, and it is because of this that we need to decisively condemn and attack this horrendous relationship in favor of relations based upon mutual respect, autonomy and free association.

Striving for the liberation of kids is not just some single-issue cause, it is not some guilt-ridden “identity politics” thing, and it is not some radical past time totally disconnected from the greater struggle against the System. The domination of kids is a form of real-life slavery that goes on all around us, it acts to reinforce and reproduce the state, capitalism and other institutions of control, and it contains within it the same fundamental relations of authority and domination that are entirely antagonistic with anarchy and

true liberation. If we are serious about bringing down this disgusting global system of control and hierarchy then we need to attack it wherever it manifests itself – and this includes within our own relationships, lives, behaviors and mentalities as well as the more traditionally “political” arenas.

Youth liberation is not a new idea, a lot of people have written about it and articulated it in different ways. There are already a number of people out there practicing, or at least trying to practice, autonomy respecting ways of relating with kids. Something new that I would like to see is a consistent, coherent and passionate defense of kids by the anarchist community. Every person goes through being a kid and that’s usually the first time the spirit is broken by authority. With this being the case, it only makes sense for anarchists to have youth liberation fully integrated with the rest of the anarchist perspective. Gerontocracy needs to be right up there with capitalism, the state, patriarchy, and white supremacy as institutions of social control that, as anarchists, we aim to destroy.