Anarchism

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2009

Contents

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES 3
SOCIALISM AND THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT 5
MIGRATIONS 6
DIVISIONS WITHIN ANARCHISM 7
DECLINE AND RENAISSANCE 10
REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS 11

In common parlance “anarchy” refers to a state of chaos or violent disorder and “anarchism” to the rebellious or merely perverse pursuit of this state. Indeed, the word “anarchist” was first used in the seventeenth century as an epithet against the defeated Levellers in the English Civil War. While the ideas and practices that would become known as anarchism were distinctly foreshadowed by movements such as the Diggers and the Ranters in the seventeenth century as well as by eighteenth-century thinkers such as William Godwin (and arguably by far more ancient schools of thought, from the Cynics of the fifth century BCE to the Taoists of a century later), it was not until Pierre-Joseph Proudhon turned this epithet into a positive self-description that we can speak of anarchism *per se*, as a historical entity. Historically speaking, however, anarchism is the name for a movement, originating in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, characterized by its vision of a society of generalized self-management, its opposition to all forms of hierarchy and domination, and its particular emphasis on means of transformative action that prefigure the desired ends. The word also serves to name the goal of the movement – substantive and universal freedom, sometimes called “anarchy” – elements of which may be found in every society that has ever existed, particularly among peoples living without private property and the state.

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Popular misunderstandings concerning anarchism, fed by more than a century and a half of sensationalistic media representations, are widespread – and, unfortunately, many scholarly accounts of anarchism do little to correct these distortions. The association of anarchy with chaos and senseless violence, while owing something to a certain phase in anarchist history (that of “propaganda by the deed”), is readily dispelled by even a cursory reading of works by actual self-described anarchists: “Anarchism …is *not* bombs, disorder, or chaos,” writes Alexander Berkman (1870–1936). “It is *not* a war of each against all. It is *not* a return to barbarism …Anarchism is the very opposite of all that” (Berkman 2003: xv). Similarly, Emma Goldman (1869–1940) defines anarchism as “the philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary” (1910: 56). The entry on anarchism that Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) wrote for the 1910 *Encyclopedia Britannica* defined it as “a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government” (2002: 284). These three explanations of anarchism – it would be difficult to find any more widely accepted by anarchists – show that anarchism is a form of social order rather than mere disorder or absence of organization; the form of social order anarchism represents is intended to maximize freedom, and to do so without recourse to the kinds of coercive institutions that are typically assumed to be necessary, variously called “government,” “law,” or “authority”; and in place of these institutions, anarchists propose to produce social order through a system of “free agreements” to meet individuals’ “needs.”

This much is easily established. What is less tractable, even when informed by these explanations, is the common perception that what is being so explained is an “ideal” – possibly a noble ideal, albeit probably impracticable, and in any case, one that has never been put into practice anywhere. This misunderstanding is reinforced by academic treatments of anarchism as an abstract set of beliefs, the history of which is primarily a history of theorists or believers. The same quotations will furnish evidence for this interpretation: Goldman and Kropotkin, for instance, speak of anarchism as a “philosophy,” a “theory,” and a “principle.” This set of beliefs is generally

taken to include the notion that there is something called "human nature," and that this nature is inherently virtuous and rational – after all, if anarchists intend to do away with "man-made laws," it must be that they rely on "natural" laws to produce order. This would seem to place anarchism within a history of ideas about "human nature" and "natural law"; in particular, it links anarchism to the more idealistic pronouncements of philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for whom the "state of nature" alone represents true freedom, "civilization" representing compromise and corruption. All that is left is to apply the test of reality: if the belief in a good human nature matched up with the way things are, anarchism would be a valid belief, but since it obviously does not – history seems amply to testify that when people are freed from coercive institutions, they are selfish and violent – anarchism is purely Utopian, an image of the perfect life that could never find realization in an imperfect world.

In fact, this conclusion, so apparently self-evident, only finds what it assumes at the start: that anarchism is a theory without a practice. This assumption not only requires that we overlook everything that anarchist writings have to say about anarchist practices (for example, the establishment of "free agreements" among "various groups"); it also requires that we ignore the concrete, material history of anarchism as a movement. To read the history of the anarchist movement is not to discover a disembodied idea floating in the heads of a few privileged thinkers. On the contrary: practices are everywhere.

The question, for instance, of how agreements are to be established between groups without subordinating them to the will of privileged decision-makers ("representatives") is not answered by abstract speculations about natural law, but by the institutionalization of very specific kinds of tactics and norms. Here is how José Llunas Pujols (1855–1905), a Catalonian worker and anarchist, describes them: "delegates," he observes, are to be "instructed in advance on how to proceed" by members of a group meeting in general assembly, and are "subject at any time to replacement or recall by the permanent suffrage of those who had given them their mandate" so that they "can never establish themselves as dictators" (quoted in Nettlau 1996: 187–8). Note that the assumption built into this practice is that delegates who are not given specific instructions, who cannot be held to account and recalled by the collectivity, may indeed be expected to seek and accumulate power. Indeed, far from assuming the best about "human nature," it often appears that anarchist practices prepare against the worst: in the words of Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76), anarchists assume that "absence of opposition and control and of continuous vigilance inevitably becomes a source of depravity for all individuals vested with social power" (2002: 245).

Anarchism consists, then, not so much in the elaboration of a "theory" in the abstract which is then to be applied to "practice" from the outside – indeed, this is a model anarchists reject as implicitly authoritarian – but in a "mode of being" (Colson 2001: 14). Indeed, as David Graeber observes, anarchism was never a political philosophy on the model of other political philosophies, speculating about the essence of humanity or offering prescriptions for the perfect society; rather, it has been "primarily an ethics of practice," the elaboration of practices that embody certain principles (2007: 305). Thus, when Goldman or Kropotkin speaks of anarchism as a "principle," this is in the sense of an ethical norm, a principle-in-action that can be extrapolated from what it is that human beings already do. For example, in his emphasis on mutualism, Kropotkin rooted his anarchism in "the countless acts of mutual support and devotion which every one of us knows from his own experience" (1989: 116). That is, anarchists proposed neither to destroy society in favor of untrammeled human nature nor to invent a new society *ex nihilo* (in the manner of

classical Utopias like Plato's *Republic*), but to extrapolate and codify certain principles already implicit within ordinary human behavior.

All of the most important formulators of anarchist theory dispensed with notions of instinctual goodness right along with the doctrine of Original Sin, rejecting Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of the state of nature as the idyllic home of the "noble savage" as well as Thomas Hobbes's conception of the state of nature as a "war of all against all." Rather than begin from any such imaginary starting point, they took for granted the fairly uncontroversial observation that human beings are capable of altruistic as well as egoistic behavior. To the extent that anarchist theory appealed to "natural laws" as the basis for a new social structure, these "laws" consisted largely of other such commonplaces, such as the recognition that concentrated power corrupts those entrusted with it, or that communities lacking a sense of solidarity and trust tend to require and solicit coercive authority. The point is neither to affirm nor to deny speculations such as Hobbes's that "man is a wolf to man," but actively to construct the social conditions under which human beings may be humane: as Paul Goodman remarks, "the moral question is not whether men [and women] are 'good enough' for a type of social organization, but whether the type of organization is useful to develop the potentialities of intelligence, grace, and freedom in [women and] men" (1968: 19).

SOCIALISM AND THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT

While existing practices – from the survival of convivial social customs to the emergence of modern workers' associations – supplied Proudhon's formulation of anarchist theory with its content, historians tend to see an anarchist movement as such emerging gradually within the First International (1864–72), where Proudhonian ideas gained popularity, and within which Mikhail Bakunin exerted an increasing influence until the final split and dissolution of the organization. Sharing the outlook reflected in the founding document written by Marx, which declared that "the emancipation of the toilers can be the work only of the toilers themselves," Bakunin argued that this self-emancipation was incompatible with the methods of struggle Marx advocated, which aimed at the capture of state power, and which depended, in view of this goal, on the formation of workers' parties that would reproduce all the features of the state (or, indeed, the church) within themselves: ideology, hierarchy, and discipline. Anarchism thus gained its identity as a movement from its relation to a broader working-class socialist movement of which it formed the anti-authoritarian wing; in the next generation, Peter Kropotkin would refer to it as "the no-government system of socialism," and from the 1890s on, the term "libertarian socialism" has entered common use as a synonym for anarchism.

A second distinction that became apparent in the controversies that tore apart the First International would prove just as significant for the future of the anarchist movement. Bakunin objected to Marx's identification of the socialist movement exclusively with the urban industrial proletariat – the particular segment of the working classes which, from the standpoint of Marx's conception of history, represented the future, beside which every other class, however underprivileged, necessarily represented the past. For Bakunin, the exclusion from the ranks of potential revolutionaries not only of the petit bourgeoisie (self-employed shopkeepers and small business proprietors) but of the peasantry (small farmers and farm workers) and even the "lumpenproletariat" (the unemployed, criminals, and others living on the margins of the capitalist system), is

unacceptable. Since, for the anarchists, revolution was not merely the inevitable outcome of a deterministic historical process but a moral obligation, all of the oppressed – in city or country, in factories or on farms, employed or unemployed, male or female – could participate. By the same token, anarchists refused to limit this revolution to a unique event or a single goal: Proudhon had spoken of "the revolution" as an ongoing process, a "permanent revolution," the scope of which could be extended indefinitely by "analogy," so that church, state, and capital appeared as so many different modes of domination. This lateral extension of the potential sites of anarchist resistance gave it a tactical and theoretical flexibility often lacking in Marxism (which would be slow to embrace forms of revolt that resisted reduction to its economic schemas and class categories), and would give anarchism relevance to political groupings that Proudhon himself had never countenanced, including women, migrant workers, homosexuals, environmentalists, ethnic minorities, and colonized peoples. In Goldman's (1910: 56) words, anarchists took "every phase of life" as a potential terrain of struggle, from education to sexuality, from art and music to diet and dress.

MIGRATIONS

Perhaps just as fundamental to the historical development of anarchism as the transmission of anarchist ideas by people in motion is the fact of motion itself, the unsettling of settled ways and the creation of a "nomadic" working class in ceaseless exchanges (Colson 2001: 140–1). People on the move, "transitional classes," seem to have constituted one of the great anarchist constituencies: not only immigrants, diasporic peoples, refugees, and exiles, but also migrant workers, hoboes, and peasants and artisans newly arrived in urban factory jobs. Indeed, Benedict Anderson suggests that the history of anarchism is fatefully intertwined with the development of the kinds of transportation and communications technologies – steamships, railways, telegraphs, etc. – that facilitated "early globalization" (2005: 2–3). Thus, anarchism spread to the Americas, Asia, Australia, and parts of Africa, largely in the luggage of immigrants. Italian immigrants, imported as cheap labor to Brazil and to Argentina, brought the anarchist idea with them, joined by Jewish anarchists fleeing pogromist Russia; Russian Jewish immigrants such as the young Emma Goldman, arriving in New York, picked it up from German immigrant anarchists like Johann Most, and her counterparts in London formed a movement around the leadership of another German anarchist émigré, Rudolf Rocker. The American anarchosyndicalist Industrial Workers of the World union exported ideas concerning direct action and extra-parliamentary politics to destinations as far away as Japan and Chile. Chinese anarchists, a number of whom absorbed the ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin while studying in Paris, became emissaries of anarchism to the rest of East Asia, as Italian anarchists did to the eastern Mediterranean, as did Eastern Europeans to Central Asia.

What is stranger and more difficult to narrate is the way in which these political missionaries generally found the idea to be in some sense "already there." Thus, as a conventionally Eurocentric history would have it, the seeds of the Mexican anarchist movement were sown in the 1860s by an itinerant Greek disciple of Proudhon, Plotino C. Rhodakanaty (1828–ca. 1885). At the same time, Rhodakanaty found in the Huichol tradition of the *calpulli* (a form of communal property) a native model of Proudhonian mutualism. Arriving in Spain in 1868, Bakunin's emissary, Giuseppe Fanelli (1826–77), found that his inability to speak Spanish hardly handicapped him; it seemed that the workers who gathered to listen were ready to hear him – having been

prepared, perhaps, by Spain's relatively early reception of Proudhon's federalist ideas, popularized as early as 1854 via Francisco Pi y Margall (1824–1901) and demonized even earlier than that by the Catholic conservative Juan Donoso Cortés – and Spain's anarchist movement quickly became one of the most vigorous in the world. Exiled to the prison colony of New Caledonia for their participation in the Paris Commune of 1871, anarchists such as Louise Michel and Maxime Lisbonne encountered the Kanak people struggling against French colonialism, and on their return to Paris, brought a distinctly anti-colonial élan to the movement there. Rebels from distant corners of the decaying Spanish Empire, encountering Spanish anarchists, adapted their ideas to their own circumstances. Chinese radicals sojourning in Tokyo in 1907 interpreted the reports of Kotoku Shusui (1871–1911) on American anarcho-syndicalism in terms of the anti-authoritarian concepts implicit in their own Taoist, Buddhist, and peasant-communalist heritage.

DIVISIONS WITHIN ANARCHISM

While adherence to the principles of opposition to domination in all forms, self-management, and means-ends coherence have generally stood as the minimal requirements for inclusion in the anarchist movement, anarchists have diverged in their interpretations of them. Divisions emerged fairly quickly, as anarchists questioned what they saw as Proudhon's inconsistent application of his own insights. Thus, Joseph Déjacque (1822–65) reproached Proudhon not only for his defense of the patriarchal family, but for his overreliance on an economic system of contracts as a replacement for the state. On the subject of gender, Déjacque's egalitarianism rapidly became the standard for the entire movement.

On the subject of economy, however, no such consensus was forthcoming. Three distinct positions emerged. One position was Proudhonian "mutualism," which described an exchange economy minus several of the defining characteristics of capitalism, such as rent, profit, interest, and absentee ownership of land, and bearing several defining characteristics of socialism, such as producer-consumer cooperatives, free credit, and a labor-time currency. Another position was "communism" (also called "anarchist communism," "anarchocommunism," or "libertarian communism"), which rejected the wage system entirely in favor of distribution according to need. Finally, there was "collectivism," a modification of the mutualist system which further emphasized collective ownership of the means of production, but which retained the principle that workers should be rewarded proportionately to their contribution in labor.

Several further developments complicated this division. The combination of anti-statism and laissez-faire capitalism that is currently called "libertarianism" in the United States – a term that, until the mid-twentieth century, was synonymous with "anarchism" *per se* – evolved from an extreme individualist offshoot from the mutualist school, which shed so many of its socialist and anti-capitalist qualities as to become all but unrecognizable. The result, sometimes called "anarcho-capitalism," is almost universally regarded by anarchists as mere capitalist ideology, an extreme version of the neoliberal doctrine now enshrined in institutions such as the World Trade Organization, no longer a form of anarchism. Nonetheless, varieties of "individualist anarchism," most ably represented by writers such as E. Armand (1872–1963) in France and Benjamin Tucker (1854–1939) in the United States, enjoyed considerable popularity, inspired partly by the posthumous popularization and translation of the "egoist" writings of Max Stirner (a.k.a. Johann Caspar Schmidt, 1806–56). While these have generally been seen by anarchists as marginal to the move-

ment, the mainstream of which has always been socialist in orientation, they have generally been seen as remaining within the anarchist orbit.

The collectivist position became associated, for a time, with strategies that integrated anarchism into the trade union movement, what became known as "anarchosyndicalism." Anarchocom-munists often criticized anarchosyndicalists both for including some form of the wage system in their vision of a post-revolutionary society, calling this merely a "mitigated individualism," and for struggling for better wages and conditions within the capitalist system, a strategy that courted the danger of cooptation and degeneration into mere self-interested reformism. Anarchosyndicalists retorted that to remain aloof from the trade union movement would be to isolate anarchism in the name of ideological purity – and indeed, anarchocommunists from Spain to Japan often called their position "pure anarchism." Where anarchosyndicalists, like other labor radicals, saw the workplace as the primary site of exploitation and therefore as the primary battleground, individualist anarchists and anarchocommunists insisted that the emancipatory struggle was equally to be located in unwaged time and space, such as in the personal realm and domestic life, where oppression was largely a matter of informal customs and traditional institutions, often reinforced by the state, for example through the apparatuses of law, public education, and medicine.

In long-term strategy, too, the individualist anarchists, anarchosyndicalists, and anarchocommunists diverged. Thus, where the Proudhonian strategy had been to avoid revolutionary "shocks" by building up popular alternatives to capitalism and the state (such as cooperatives and credit unions) so as to gradually supplant them, anarchosyndicalists assigned the task of "forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old" to the labor union, which, on the eve of the last great general strike, would then serve as a ready-made organ for the self-management of society, a federation of workers coordinating production for use in the absence of capital and the state (Industrial Workers of the World 1908: 1). This conception of the union as the "embryo" of anarchy, strikingly similar to the notion of the *soviets* or "workers' councils" in the libertarian Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919) and others, seemed overly reductive and rigid to anarchocommunists, for whom the proper unit of society was not the workplace but the community. It is argued that the commune is not only the most appropriate form for the expressions of all sides of the human person (rather than reducing the person to mere producer), but also more suited to the ecological vision of human beings as organisms inhabiting an environment.

Numerous attempts have been made to reconcile these schools of anarchism. As early as 1889, Fernando Tarrida del Mármol (1861–1915) sought to calm tensions in the Spanish anarchist movement by an appeal to "anarchism without adjectives." As revolutionary unions gained ground in the early twentieth century, the animosity and distrust between anarchosyndicalists and anarchocommunists faded, with prominent representatives of both camps, such as Peter Kropotkin and Victor Griffuelhes, making significant concessions to one another, and ultimately, the most powerful anarchosyndicalist union, the Spanish Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT), formally adopted "libertarian communism" as part of its official program in 1936. In the 1920s pragmatists like Errico Malatesta (1853–1932) argued that the differences between communist and individualist "schools of thought" could be resolved in practice, while Voline (a.k.a. Vsevolod Mikhailovitch Eichenbaum, 1882–1945) and Sébastien Faure (1858–1942) proposed an "anarchist synthesis" that included elements of all three schools. Meanwhile, from another direction, a group of anarchists including Nest Makhno (1888–1934) and Peter Arshinov (1887–1937) pro-

posed to reconstruct the anarchist movement around a kind of constitution, a "program" setting forth "hard and fast positions" on matters of theory, tactics, and organization, dubbed *The Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists.* Not only was this controversy not resolved, but other disagreements about means and ends have proliferated.

Another serious dispute concerned the question of organization. "Anti-organizationa lists" such as Luigi Galleani (1861–1931), anticipating the advent of what would become known as "insurrectionary anarchism" a century later, saw formal organizations as perpetually in danger of becoming rigid, gradually reproducing all the salient features of the state; "organizationalists" countered, with Malatesta, that "the less organized we have been, the more prone are we to be imposed on by a few individuals" (Galleani 2006: 3; Malatesta 1993: 86).

Anarchopacifists such as Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) have charged that violent means are radically incoherent with anarchist ends – an argument that has been rejected by a majority of anarchists, who have judged that this is to hold the oppressed, who are always in a legitimate state of self-defense, to an impossible standard. Nonetheless, there was a general shift in opinion, particularly after the spectacular violence and reprisals of the early 1890s, against individual acts of violence against persons – e.g., assassinations (*attentats*) and bombings ("propaganda by the deed") – and toward modes of action, such as labor organizing, cultural resistance, and education, that could be pursued more openly and peacefully even under capitalist and statist conditions.

As early as the 1890s, anarchists such as Henry Zisly (1872–1945), calling themselves "naturistes" "naturianistes," or "naturiens," declared machines, science, and "civilization" as such to be oppressive and destructive of both the natural environment and human freedom, declaring themselves in favor of a "return to a more natural life" on the model of primitive peoples. Since the 1970s, John Zerzan (b. 1943) and others have revived this critique of technology and modernity, in forms strongly influenced by the Marxist theory of the Frankfurt School, under the name of "primitivism." Where the naturiens were largely ignored or ridiculed by the leading anarchists of their day, who generally embraced scientific and technological progress as sources of revolutionary hope, the dire military and ecological trends of the mid-to-late twentieth century have made it more difficult to dismiss the charge that science and technology may both presuppose and reinforce domination and ecocide, and that it is naive to think that we can use them for other purposes. Nonetheless, a number of "eco-anarchists" such as Bookchin insist that certain sciences and technologies are presently useful and necessary, and that they may be made both humane and ecologically sound; conversely, it is argued, it is primitivism which has been naive in returning to Rousseau's "noble savage" mythology (Bookchin 1971: 41–84; 1995: 36–51).

Despite the strongly anti-clerical thrust of anarchism as developed by Proudhon and Bakunin, who dedicated entire books to attacks on the church, and by anarchist educators such as Francisco Ferrer y Guardia (1859–1909), whose aim was to provide a rational, scientific, materialist alternative to religiously sanctioned pedagogy, a number of anarchists from the nineteenth century on, especially those influenced by the writings of Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), have argued for the compatibility of some varieties of religion with anarchism. Indeed, a number of important precursors to modern anarchism stem from religious traditions such as Taoism or the radical Protestantism of Gerrard Winstanley (1609–76). While representing a minority tendency within the movement, religious anarchism has exerted for some a strong enough appeal.

The popularity of nationalism has posed a similar problem for anarchist theory and practice. For instance, while the overwhelming majority of Jewish anarchists were atheists and internationalists, enough were attracted by the project of Palestinian settlement in the early twentieth

century for the term "anarcho-Zionism" to come into use. Committed to internationalism in principle, anarchists such as Bakunin and Kropotkin nonetheless sympathized with oppressed peoples engaging in nationalist movements, particularly when these were articulated as forms of rebellion against colonial regimes such as those exercised by Russia over Poland. For many, this extended naturally to the struggles of "stateless" peoples such as the Jews against oppression in diaspora. Moreover, anarcho-Zionists such as Bernard Lazare (1865–1903) were careful to differentiate their aspirations from the desire for a state of any kind. Nonetheless, anarchists from Proudhon to Fredy Perlman (1934–85) have warned against support for nationalist aspirations of any kind for any reason, arguing that they always create new forms of oppression.

The tension between anarchism as a particular movement and its universalist aims has never ceased to raise questions. Indeed, the decision of the Spanish CNT union to join other left-wing factions in a Popular Front government in order to resist the fascists – for many then and since, a clear violation of principles – was defended in part by the argument that anarchists were too small a faction to dictate to others what course to take. In more recent decades this tension has manifested itself in connection with solidarity work of various kinds – for instance, of white American anarchists in support of African American movements or the Zapatista revolt in Mexico. For some anarchists, this kind of support work, reaching across sometimes substantial differences in goals and tactics, often means an unacceptable compromise; it is argued that to abandon, defer, or disguise anarchist goals in order to serve others is either to manipulate them or to be manipulated by them, and that anarchists should instead embrace their specificity, organizing their own movements and arguing openly for their ideas, finding allies where they can. On the other hand, anarchists inspired by the Zapatista principle of *mandar obedeciendo* ("leading by obeying") as well as by the anarchist tradition of mistrust for Leninist-style vanguardism argue that rather than presuming to "lead" social movements of the oppressed, anarchists should attempt to help existing movements to self-organize, even when not all goals are shared.

Finally, the very fact of living within the state poses routine moral and tactical problems for anarchists, particularly in so far as states adopt some of the characteristics of democracy and socialism. Proudhon himself, in the revolutionary moment of 1848, sought election to the French parliament as a platform for his economic proposals, albeit without success and to his rapid regret. Then and now, each election renews the question of whether it is appropriate or useful for anarchists to vote in defense of civil rights and social welfare. For many anarchists (and perhaps most), this question is always to be answered in the negative, on principle: even when there is something to be gained by voting or lost by abstaining, voting fails the test of means-ends consistency. Moreover, it is argued, such engagement with the system always risks legitimizing it, diluting radical energies; reforms and welfare initiatives stifle discontent and coopt potential revolutionary actors, and even voting defensively against fascists means becoming the tool of political rivals. However, a number of anarchists, from Saverio Merlino (1856–1930) to Noam Chomsky (b. 1928), have objected to hardline abstentionism, which can seem to sacrifice the direct interests of the oppressed in the present for the sake of a principle located in the future.

DECLINE AND RENAISSANCE

While it is extremely difficult to estimate the size of the anarchist movement at any point in its history with any real certainty, it may nonetheless be possible to date the height of its global

scope and power to the years just before and after 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution. However, the triumph of the Bolsheviks in Russia, at first taken as a sign of hope, was to prove disastrous for the anarchist movement on several counts. First, the Soviet state itself became one of the most powerful enemies of anarchist movements within its own territories (crushing the Makhnovist revolt in the Ukraine and the uprising at Kronstadt, jailing and exiling anarchist dissidents) and in Spain, where Stalin's machinations were instrumental in securing the collapse of resistance to the fascist coup. Waves of anti-communist reaction in the United States and elsewhere pushed workers away from anarchism, serving meanwhile as the pretext for another round of repressive state measures. Perhaps more fatally, Bolshevism became established as the model par excellence of revolutionary action and post-revolutionary organization, copied all over the globe by emergent socialist and nationalist movements, reversing the terms of the old rivalry.

Many histories of anarchism written from the standpoint of the end of the twentieth century ring the curtain down after the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, concluding that while anarchism persisted as an idea among scattered groups and isolated intellectuals, it never again enjoyed the close link it once had to active mass movements. Even the worldwide rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s, after the fact, appeared to have been a radical hiccup in a world-system otherwise stably split between finance capitalism and bureaucratic socialism, giving way in its turn to a monopolar world dominated by multinational capital and American military power.

From the standpoint of the last decade, this assessment seems to have been premature: indeed, quite suddenly, in the wake of the Seattle protests of 1999, observers of the nascent global justice movement noted that anarchism seemed to be "the radical ideology that prevails among its core activists" (Epstein 2001: 13). Over the same period – notably in regions hit hardest by neoliberal doctrines, such as Argentina after the economic collapse of 2001 and New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina – anarchist practices of mutual aid and direct action were spontaneously reinvented as means of survival.

The "new anarchism" is in many ways discontinuous with the old, both institutionally and ideologically. Many of the new anarchists have nothing to do with the surviving anarchist unions and federations, have little expectation of an imminent revolution, and theorize in terms strongly inflected both by the "New Social Movements" of the 1960s and 1970s (particularly ecology and feminism) and by the post-Marxist and postmodern philosophies that emerged from that era as alternatives to the varieties of Marxist discourse still dominant in the New Left. The continuities, however, are arguably profound – both in terms of the unresolved problems and the unexhausted possibilities.

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Published in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest.*

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