

Return to Anarchy

Larry DeCoster

1966

Radicalism needs a new orientation toward a society essentially different from that observed by Marx. American bourgeois society under its new material conditions demands the reintroduction of the "ideal" consciousness and "utopian" anarchism to destroy the bourgeois anachronism which, though more powerful than ever, is yet very unstable and liable to shock from heretofore most improbable sectors.

Bourgeois society, as established by the Reformation and Parliamentary Revolutions, arose, as all systems before it, in a state of scarcity, with an inability to adequately supply the wants of all. Capital production, viewed anthropologically, sought to produce abundance while providing a system of authority (not unlike its predecessors in any manner which might affect the non-rulers, beyond its new class basis). Exploitation, the divine command to work, and police coercion were unavoidable. In this situation, Bourgeois society was a living entity, necessary to evolution, though decidedly inferior in efficiency to the Marxist alternative which arose with the expansion of production. This inferiority is evident in the incredibly rapid technological development of Russia et al, especially when contrasted to an India. There is no longer any reason, anthropologically again, for its further existence.

An understanding of bourgeois morality (a system of values which makes this society, despite any of its advances, particularly obnoxious to me) is particularly important for understanding the present situation. Complementary to an unequal distribution of material products is an unequal distribution of knowledge in terms both of societal position and age-knowledge of a particular variety necessary for the cumulative process of production and control. At the apex are the planners, leaders, teachers—the experts—and at the bottom, the criminals, malcontents, and radicals whose orientation is outside the bounds of bourgeois knowledge. Negroes, for example, are sub-bourgeois because they are "shiftless", "lazy", and "immoral" (the sexual mores cannot be overlooked); or, translated, as a group, follow a personal orientation because socially they have been rendered obsolete in terms of production and therefore are beyond the pale of bourgeois morality.

Concomitant to the system of knowledge is the system of control. There are not just cops, courts, and soldiers in this network but social workers, supervisors, teachers, priests—a cop for every activity which can be organized. Therein lies the traditional dislike of anarchists for organization, organization on the bourgeois standard of control, not mass expression. Such a morality has objective basis only in a situation of scarcity, not one of abundance.

Not only does a state of abundance now exist; but, under the impetus of World War II, Korea, and now Vietnam, cybernetics and automation in the field of production now can allow this society to dispense with most, if not all, production workers. The prospect of the removal of man from the realm of production and therefore to a great degree from the realm of necessity, would seem to necessitate a suitable celebration, e.g., a social revolution. But this bourgeois society quite naturally has other plans, namely its preservation and consolidation.

If the development of abundance ends the necessity for this society, it also gives this society the chance to stabilize itself. In the '30's, it dispelled the anarchy of the market to prevent, or at least at the time postpone, depression; and instituted measures to ameliorate the situation, such as the acceptance of labor unions into the Establishment. Since then, the process of exploitation, as practiced from the late 1800s on, was ameliorated at the cost of a great number of people who were cast out of the bottom of the societal structure. Now, to reintroduce these troublesome people into society, new programs like the "War on Poverty" have been introduced, which, though quite inadequate to the task, like any pilot program, and hampered by political corruption, has the potential to achieve its goal. Fortunately, many of these people have not the slightest interest in the moral value of work or in being educated into an essentially alien society.

This consolidation requires a police state to standardize life within described limits and to isolate and ultimately destroy anti-social patterns. This process demands universal controls and a totality of information. Education and employment are the traditional, not to mention ritualistic, controls. Information began its systematization with Social Security and the Selective Service System and has expanded with auto titles, deeds, credit, diplomas etc., now beginning its centralization through state police records among others. In California, the most "progressive" state of the union, a driver's license—the basis of all identification here—can within a few minutes detail not only all police records and traffic information of its owner in the western states, but further yield information on credit and employment. This activity is but the beginning of a trend which must necessarily inhibit all deviant behavior. The state does not, however, have to be too rigid in its restrictions and can at times absorb protest which can reasonably be replaced by presidential commissions and their ilk. Though the technique of establishment usurpation of protest activity, from union struggles to civil rights, is a known quantity, still it has hardly gone so far as President Johnson's "We Shall Overcome". This does not mean there will be no change but rather that the change will not be disruptive to the system. Any grievance which can be removed by wealth will be removed. This attempt at absorption of protest and the rapidly developing police techniques to quiet, isolate, and finally destroy protests are illustrative of the ever-expanding control techniques of this very conscious apparatus.

In a general view, we have a society attempting to stabilize itself in a hierarchical form; a government of experts and institutions unquestioned as to their necessity or value; a social dialectical (non-Marxian) framework for the stabilization of the bourgeois system of reason. Within this framework, economic equality and abundance for all are not only possible but distinctly probable. All radicals who base their radicalism on these factors must inevitably join the establishment, in glory like so many of the chief personnel of the unions or government agencies or obscurely like many others, or stubbornly cling to the superiority of a Lenin or Mao to a Lincoln or Johnson—a patently silly orientation.

The inadequacy of the "socialist" states as the basis of any radical activity is not based in a "revolution-betrayed" attitude. Stalinism and Stakhanovism were natural outcomes of the economic situation—even if they could have been avoided. The real inadequacy of the "socialist"

states was indicated at different times, Kronstadt in Russia, Hungary in 1956, the "100 Flowers Campaign" in China. The "permanent revolution", outside the halcyon days of the revolution itself, is denied by the "revolutionary state" whose morality and police structure are counterparts of bourgeois society.

Radicalism has, on the whole, not attempted to fit itself to a new set of objective conditions. Consciousness, not material determination, is most important. That the U.S. could ride through the '30's with the bourgeois structure intact when a socialist revolution alone was the answer; and now that man the toiler is rapidly losing objective significance though bourgeois morality remains, can only be accounted for by a consciousness of society beyond the material conditions. To find the yoke of work removed but the cop remaining is a particularly grotesque feature. Social Revolution in all its millenarian splendor must be reasserted, that is, the revolution of consciousness must be reasserted in the same manner as the Bourgeois Reformation. Bourgeois culture, values, morality, institutions and authority must be attacked with radical fervor. Anti-social behavior which particularly highlights the discrepancy between society and its material base must take our attention as the pre-war union struggles did an earlier generation's. Those who cheat on welfare, drop out of school, attack cops, smoke pot or take acid, sabotage, riot and burn must be recognized as the only ones now capable of shaking society because it is they who attack the bourgeois system of reason which alone holds society together. The establishment already recognizes their worth and is strenuously counter-attacking. Watts scared the establishment by its size, militancy, and, especially, its lack of leadership. The knowledge that the rioters were not led into the situation but rather went en masse is disturbing to them. Their major call in the McCone report was for the introduction of leadership into the ghetto to stop another such occurrence. It is the individual anarchic act which shakes society and we must aid in its proliferation.

LDC

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