

The Real Sons of Anarchy

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A young biker sits with his back against a graffitied stone wall off a hiking trail near the Nevada border, his face buried in a notebook. His name is Jax Teller and he's the vice president of the Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club – Redwood Original, or SAMCRO for short, and the book he's reading is his father's memoirs:

First time I read Emma Goldman wasn't in a book. I was sixteen, hiking near the Nevada border. The quote was painted on a wall in red. When I saw those words it was like someone ripped them from the inside of my head.

"Anarchism... stands for liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from shackles and restraint of government. It stands for social order based on the free grouping of individuals."

The concept was pure, simple, true. It inspired me. Lit a rebellious fire, but ultimately I learned the lesson that Goldman, Proudhon and the others learned. That true freedom requires sacrifice and pain. Most human beings only think they want freedom. In truth they yearn for the bondage of social order, rigid laws, materialism. The only freedom man really wants, is the freedom to become comfortable.

See the name Sons of Anarchy wasn't chosen lightly. It was a reflection of his dad's original vision for the MC as one of the Original 9 – the group of 9 who founded the first chapter. A group of jaded Vietnam War vets on the open road, living their lives against the grain, forming strong community bonds of mutual aid and solidarity, and attempting to find true freedom in an unfree world. But J.T. Saw his anarchist vision of a "Harley commune" slowly be corrupted by crime and violence.

Now of course Sons of Anarchy is only a television show but it does point out the commonalities between anarchist and biker culture and how motorcycle clubs could indeed fit the mold of an anarchist commune given the right vision. And while bikers in Greece ride around in packs waving red and black flags and beating the living tar out of Golden Dawn members and other fascists, the best group to prove this potential in America is the Bastards MC in South Carolina. Self-proclaimed as the only Antifa MC in America, the Bastards are a motley crew of former

1%-ers, other bikers, and punks rockers of all races, genders, and sexualities who wish to fight against the public perception that all bikers are bigoted.

Named after the infamous Nazi hunters from Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Bastards*, the MC is known to pop up at Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi rallies and flex their muscles and send the bigots running. When it backfires and they're attacked, they stand ready always armed with makeshift weapons such as the ever favorite padlock tied to a bandana. As a group they publicly side with the Black Lives Matter movement and vow to fight sexism, classism, and anti-queer sentiment within biker culture and society as a whole. Their facebook is plastered with pictures of the club hanging out with members of the punk band Millions of Dead Cops, members partying with other MCs, anti-capitalist quotations from Stokely Carmichael and other radicals, and announcements for major rides. Hunter S. Thompson would likely be proud.

In the mid-60s the famous gonzo reporter spent several months riding with the Hells Angels which became the basis for his article for *The Nation* entitled *Motorcycle Gangs: Losers and Outsiders* which eventually lead to a book deal resulting in *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw*.

The widespread appeal of the Angels is worth pondering. Unlike most other rebels, the Angels have given up hope that the world is going to change for them. They assume, on good evidence, that the people who run the social machinery have little use for outlaw motorcyclists, and they are reconciled to being losers. But instead of losing quietly, one by one, they have banded together with a mindless kind of loyalty and moved outside the framework, for good or ill. They may not have an answer, but at least they are still on their feet. One night about halfway through one of their weekly meetings I thought of Joe Hill on his way to face a Utah firing squad and saying his final words: Don't mourn. Organize. It is safe to say that no Hell's Angel has ever heard of Joe Hill or would know a Wobbly from a bushmaster, but there is something very similar about the attitudes. The Industrial Workers of the World had serious blueprints for society, while the Hell's Angels mean only to defy the social machinery. There is no talk among the Angels of building a better world, yet their reactions to the world they live in are rooted in the same kind of anarchic, para-legal sense of conviction that brought the armed wrath of the Establishment down on the Wobblies. There is the same kind of suicidal loyalty, the same kind of in-group rituals and nicknames, and above all the same feeling of constant warfare with an unjust world.

And many radical leftists at the time saw this common attitude – the strong bonds of solidarity and mutual aid and the bucking of authority – and developed an unrealistic picture of what the Angels really were.

The Hell's Angels' massive publicity – coming hard on the heels of the widely publicized student rebellion in Berkeley – was interpreted in liberal-radical-intellectual circles as the signal for a natural alliance. Beyond that, the Angels' aggressive, anti-social stance – their alienation, as it were – had a tremendous appeal for the more aesthetic Berkeley temperament. Students who could barely get up the nerve to sign a petition or to shoplift a candy bar were fascinated by tales of the Hell's Angels

ripping up towns and taking whatever they wanted. Most important, the Angels had a reputation for defying police, for successfully bucking authority, and to the frustrated student radical this was a powerful image indeed. They didn't come with theories and songs and quotations, but with noise and muscle and sheer balls.

Of course contrary to what these naive activists thought of the Angels, much of their politics were at polar opposites from each other, something that surprised them later when several Hells Angels attacked anti-Vietnam War protesters at Berkeley during a demonstration.

The difference between the student radicals and the Hell's Angels is that the students are rebelling against the past, while the Angels are fighting the future. Their only common ground is their disdain for the present, or the status quo.

But even if such visions did not match the reality of the Angels or most MCs in general, does not mean that those visions could never be realized. Already many MCs are involved in apolitical charity works from cancer runs to groups like Bikers Against Child Abuse and some sadly have formed such movements as Bikers for Trump, but all this shows that motorcycle clubs could operate similarly to an anarchist affinity group planning and carrying through direct actions. This is perfectly echoed in the Bastards Anti-Fascist Action work. MCs also operate very much as a mutual aid society for its members and their families. As a rule, MCs are very tight-knit. Solidarity, mutual aid, and sharing are all practiced freely among members. Thompson observed this firsthand with the example of beer. When he showed up to a party with a car full, everyone dug in without even asking. When all his beer was drank he started taking from the Hells Angels' beer pile.

The outlaws gave it no thought. To them it was just as natural for me to have their beer as for them to have mine. By the end of the weekend I'd consumed three or four times as much as I'd brought with me... and even now, looking back on nearly a year of drinking with the Angels, I think I came out ahead. But that isn't the way they balance the books. Despite their swastika fetish, the fiscal relationship between Angels is close to pure communism: from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs. The timing and the spirit of the exchange are just as important as the volume. Much as they claim to admire the free enterprise system, they can't afford it among themselves. Their working ethic is more on the order of He who has, shares. There is nothing verbal or dogmatic about it; they just couldn't make it any other way.

So while some motorcycle clubs may make poor allies to a truly libertarian movement, groups like the Bastards prove it's not impossible to be a radical and a biker, that in fact they can serve to compliment each other. The Bastards fulfill the former college radical's vision of what the Hells Angels could have been with a more thought out and consistent anti-authoritarian ethos and stand as hopeful inspiration for others to step forth and do the same. Keep riding strong all you radical bikers, we need you.

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