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## About Anarchism

Nicolas Walter

**ABOUT ANARCHISM**  
**WHAT ANARCHISTS BELIEVE**  
**HOW ANARCHISTS DIFFER**  
**WHAT ANARCHISTS WANT**  
**WHAT ANARCHISTS DO**  
**ANARCHY 100**

Nicolas Walter  
About Anarchism  
June 1969

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it has accepted a full part. The particular anarchist contribution to such occasions is twofold—to emphasise the goal of a libertarian society, and to insist on libertarian methods of achieving it. This is in fact a single contribution, for the most important point we can make is not just that the end does not justify the means, but that the means determines the end—that means *are* ends in most cases. We can be sure of our own actions, but not of the consequences.

A good opportunity for anarchists to give society a push towards anarchism seems to be active participation on these lines in such nonsectarian movements as the Committee of 100 in Britain, the March 22 Movement in France, the SDS in Germany, the Provos in Holland, the Zengakuren in Japan, and the various civil rights, draft resistance, and student power groups in the United States. In the old days the greatest opportunity for really substantial movement towards anarchism was of course in militant syndicalist episodes in France, Spain, Italy, the United States and Russia, and above all in the revolutions of Russia and Spain; nowadays it is not so much in the violent and authoritarian revolutions of Asia, Africa and South America as in insurrectionary upheavals such as those of Hungary in 1956 and France in 1968—and Britain when?

mer anarchists who have not given up their beliefs but no longer hope for success; it is also the practice of many active anarchists who keep their beliefs intact and carry on as if they still hoped for success but who know—consciously or unconsciously—that they will never see it. What most anarchists have been involved in during the last century may be described as permanent protest when it is looked at with hindsight; but it is just as dogmatic to say that things will never change as to say that things are bound to change, and no one can tell when protest might become effective and the present might suddenly turn into the future. The real distinction is that permanent protest is thought of as a rearguard action in a hopeless cause, while most anarchist activity is thought of as the action of a vanguard or at least of scouts in a struggle which we may not win and which may never end but which is still worth fighting.

The best tactics in this struggle are all those which are consistent with the general strategy of the war for freedom and equality, from guerrilla skirmishes in one's private life to set battles in major social campaigns. Anarchists are almost always in a small minority, so they have little choice of battlefield but have to fight wherever the action is. In general the most successful occasions have been those when anarchist agitation has led to anarchist participation in wider left-wing movements—especially in the labour movement, but also in anti-militarist or even pacifist movements in countries preparing for or fighting in wars, anti-clerical and humanist movements in religious countries, movements for national or colonial liberation, for racial or sexual equality, for legal or penal reform, or for civil liberties in general.

Such participation inevitably means alliance with non-anarchist groups and some compromise of anarchist principles, and anarchists who become deeply involved in such action are always in danger of abandoning anarchism altogether. On the other hand, refusal to take such a risk generally means sterility and sectarianism, and the anarchist movement has tended to be influential only when

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tions of the anarchist movement, and of course far outside as well. Instead of attacking society, the bohemian drops out of it—though, while living without conforming to the values of society, he usually lives in and on society. A lot of nonsense is talked about this tendency. Bohemians may be parasites, but that is true of many other people. On the other hand they don't hurt anyone except themselves, which is not true of many other people. The best thing that can be said about them is that they can do some good by enjoying themselves and challenging received values in an ostentatious but harmless way. The worst thing that can be said about them is that they cannot really change society and may divert energy from trying to do this, which for most anarchists is the whole point of anarchism.

A more consistent and constructive way of dropping out of society is to leave it and set up a new self-sufficient community. This has at times been a widespread phenomenon, among religious enthusiasts during the Middle Ages, for instance, and among many kinds of people more recently, especially in North America and of course in Palestine. Anarchists have been affected by (his tendency in the past, but not much nowadays; like other left-wing groups, they are more likely to set up their own informal community, based on a network of people living and working together within society, than to secede from society. This may be thought of as the nucleus of a new form of society growing inside the old forms, or else as a viable form of refuge from the demands of authority which is not too extreme for ordinary people.

Another form of action which is based on a pessimistic view of the prospects for anarchism is permanent protest. According to this view, there is no hope of changing society, of destroying the state system, and of putting anarchism into practice. What is important is not the future, the strict adherence (<> a fixed ideal and the careful elaboration of a beautiful utopia, but the present, the belated recognition of a bitter reality and the constant resistance to an ugly situation. Permanent protest is the theory of many for-

and also with itself. Most forms of political action by opposition groups are mainly designed to win power; some groups use the techniques of direct action, but as soon as they win power they not only stop using such techniques but prevent any other groups using them either. Anarchists are in favour of direct action at all times; they see it as normal action, as action which reinforces itself anti grows as it is used, as action which can be used to create and also to sustain a free society.

But there are some anarchists who have no faith in the possibility of creating a free society, and their action varies accordingly. One of the strongest pessimistic tendencies in anarchism is nihilism. Nihilism was the word which Turgenev coined (in his novel *Father and Sons*) to describe the sceptical and scornful attitude of the young populists in Russia a century ago, but it came to mean the view which denies the value not only of the state or of prevailing morality, but of society and of humanity itself; for the strict nihilist nothing is sacred, not even himself—so nihilism is one step beyond the most thorough egoism.

An extreme form of action inspired by nihilism is terrorism for its own sake rather than for revenge or propaganda. Anarchists have no monopoly of terror, but it has sometimes been fashionable in some sections of the movement. After the frustrating experience of preaching a minority theory in a hostile or often indifferent society, it is tempting to attack society physically. It may not do much about the hostility, but it will certainly end the indifference; let them hate me, so long as they fear me, is the terrorist's line of thought. But if reasoned assassination has been unproductive, random terror has been counter-productive, and it is not too much to say that nothing has done more damage to anarchism than the streak of psychopathic violence which always ran and still runs through it.

A milder form of action inspired by nihilism is bohemianism, which is a constant phenomenon though the name seems to change for each manifestation. This too has been fashionable in some sec-

The modern anarchist movement is now a hundred years old, counting from when the Bakuninists entered the First International, and in this country there has been a continuous anarchist movement for ninety years (the Freedom Press has been going since 1886). Such a past is a source of strength, but it is also a source of weakness—especially in the printed word. The anarchist literature of the past weighs heavily on the present, and makes it hard for us to produce a new literature for the future. And yet, though the works of our predecessors are numerous, most of them are out of print, and the rest are mostly out of date; moreover, the great majority of anarchist works published in English have been translations from other languages.

This means there is little that we can call our own. What follows is an attempt to add to it by making a fresh statement of anarchism. It is addressed in particular to readers in Britain at the end of the 1960s—a place and a time in which there is a considerable revival of interest in anarchism as a basis not for sectarian argument about the past but for practical discussion about the future.

Such a statement is necessarily an individual view, for one of the essential features of anarchism is that it relies on individual judgement; but it is intended to take account of the general views prevailing in the anarchist movement and to interpret them without prejudice. It is expressed in simple language and without constant reference to other writers or to past events, so that it can be understood without difficulty and without any previous knowledge. But it is derived from what other people have said in the past, and does not purport to be original. Nor is it meant to be definitive; there is far more to say about anarchism than can be fitted into thirty-two pages, and this summary will no doubt soon be superseded like nearly all those that have preceded it.

Above all, I make no claim to authority, for another essential feature of anarchism is that it rejects the authority of any spokesman. If my readers have no criticism to make, I have failed. What follows is simply a personal account of anarchism drawn from the experi-

ence of fifteen years' reading anarchist literature and discussing anarchist ideas, and of ten years' taking part in anarchist activities and writing in the anarchist press.

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which anarchists have been happiest and which is most typical of anarchism is direct action.

The idea of direct action is also often misunderstood, by anarchists as well as their enemies again. When the phrase was first used (during the 1890s) it meant no more than the opposite of "political"—that is, parliamentary—action; and in the context of the labour movement it meant "industrial" action, especially strikes, boycotts and sabotage, which were thought of as preparations for and rehearsals of revolution. The point was that the action is applied not indirectly through representatives but directly by the people most closely involved in a situation and directly on the situation, and it is intended to win some measure of success rather than mere publicity.

This would seem clear enough, but direct action has in fact been confused with propaganda by deed and especially with civil disobedience. The technique of direct action was actually developed in the French syndicalist movement in reaction against the more extreme techniques of propaganda by deed; instead of getting sidetracked into dramatic but ineffective gestures, the trade-unionists got on with the dull but effective work—that at least was the theory. But as the syndicalist movement grew and came into conflict with the system in France, Spain, Italy, the United States and Russia, and even Britain, the high points of direct action began to take on the same function as acts of propaganda by deed. Then, when Gandhi began to describe as direct action what was really a non-violent form of civil disobedience, all three phases were confused and came to mean much the same—more or less any form of political activity which is against the law or otherwise outside the accepted rules of constitutional etiquette.

For most anarchists, however, direct action still has its original meaning, though as well as its traditional forms it also takes new ones—invading military bases or taking over universities, squatting in houses or occupying factories. What makes it particularly attractive to anarchists is that it is consistent with libertarian principles

thorities; but there have been times when some anarchists have found it a useful form of propaganda.

Agitation, especially when it is successful, and propaganda by deed, especially when it is illegal, both go further than mere propaganda. Agitation incites action, and propaganda by deed involves action; it is here that anarchists move into the field of action and that anarchism begins to become serious.

## Action

The change from theorising about anarchism to putting it into practice means a change in organisation. The typical discussion or propaganda group, which is open to easy participation by outsiders and easy observation by the authorities, and which is based on each member doing what he wants to do and not doing what he doesn't want to do, will become more exclusive and more formal. This is a moment of great danger, since an attitude which is too rigid leads to authoritarianism and sectarianism, while one which is too lax leads to confusion and irresponsibility. It is a moment of even greater danger, since when anarchism becomes a serious matter anarchists become a serious threat to the authorities, and real persecution begins.

The most common form of anarchist action is for agitation over an issue to become participation in a campaign. This may be reformist, for something which would not change the whole system, or revolutionary, for a change in (the system itself; it may be legal or illegal or both, violent or non-violent or just un-violent. It may have a chance of success, or it may be hopeless from the start. The anarchists may be influential or even dominant in the campaign, or they may be only one of many groups taking part. It does not take long to think of a wide variety of possible fields of action, and for a century anarchists have tried them all. The form of action with

## What Anarchists Believe

The first anarchists were people in the English and French revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who were given the name as an insult to suggest that they wanted anarchy in the sense of chaos or confusion. But from the 1840s anarchists were people who accepted the name as a sign to show that they wanted anarchy in the sense of absence of government. The Greek word *anarkhia*, like the English word "anarchy", has both meanings; people who are not anarchists take them to come to the same thing, but anarchists insist on keeping them apart. For more than a century, anarchists have been people who believe not only that absence of government need not mean chaos and confusion, but that a society without government will actually be better than the society we live in now.

Anarchism is the political elaboration of the psychological reaction against authority which appears in all human groups. Everyone knows the natural anarchists who will not believe or do something just because someone tells them to. Throughout history the practical tendency towards anarchy is seen among individuals and groups rebelling against those who rule them. The theoretical idea of anarchy is also very old; thus the description of a past golden age without government may be found in the thought of ancient China and India, Egypt and Mesopotamia, and Greece and Rome, and in the same way the wish for a future utopia without government may be found in the thought of countless religious and political writers and communities. But the application of anarchy to the present situation is more recent, and it is only in the anar-

chist movement of the past century that we find the demand for a society without government here and now.

Other groups on both left and right want to get rid of government in theory, either when the market is so free that it needs no more supervision, or when the people are so equal that they need no more restraint, but the measures they take seem to make government stronger and stronger. It is the anarchists, and the anarchists alone, who want to get rid of government in practice. This does not mean that anarchists think all men are naturally good, or identical, or perfectible, or any romantic nonsense of that kind. It means that anarchists think almost all men are sociable, and similar, and capable of living their own lives. Many people say that government is necessary because some men cannot be trusted to look after themselves, but anarchists say that government is harmful because no men can be trusted to look after anyone else. If all men are so bad that they need to be ruled by others, anarchists ask, how can any men be good enough to rule others? Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. At the same time, the wealth of the earth is the product of the labour of mankind as a whole, and all men have an equal right to take part in continuing the labour and enjoying the product. Anarchism is an ideal type which demands at the same time total freedom and total equality.

## **Liberalism and socialism**

Anarchism may be seen as a development from either liberalism or socialism, or from both liberalism and socialism. Like liberals, anarchists want freedom; like socialists, anarchists want equality. But we are not satisfied by liberalism alone or by socialism alone. Freedom without equality means that the poor and weak are less free than the rich and strong, and equality without freedom means that we are all slaves together. Freedom and equality are not contradictory, but complementary; in place of the old polar-

kind of stress in the state system—during national or civil wars, industrial or agrarian struggles, campaigns against oppression or public scandals—and it consists essentially of propaganda brought down to earth and made practicable. In a situation of growing consciousness, people are not so much interested in general speculation as in specific proposals. This is the opportunity to show in detail what is wrong with the present system and how it could be put right. Anarchist agitation has sometimes been effective, especially in France, Spain and the United States before the First World War, in Russia, Italy and China after it, and in Spain during the 1930s; it has occasionally been effective in Britain, in the 1880s, in the early 1940s, and again in the 1960s.

The idea of propaganda by deed is often misunderstood, by anarchists as well as their enemies. When the phrase was first used (during the 1870s) it meant demonstrations, riots and risings which were thought of as symbolic actions designed to win useful publicity rather than immediate success. The point was that the propaganda would consist not just of talk about what could be done but of news about what had been done. It did not originally and does not necessarily mean violence, let alone assassination; but after the wave of outrages by individual anarchists during the 1890s, propaganda by deed became popularly identified with personal acts of violence, and this image has not yet faded.

For most anarchists nowadays, however, propaganda by deed is more likely to be non-violent, or at least un-violent, and to be against bombs rather than with them. It has in fact reverted to its original meaning, though it now tends to take rather different forms—sit-downs and sit-ins, organised heckling and unorthodox demonstrations. Propaganda by deed need not be illegal, though it often is. Civil disobedience is a special type of propaganda by deed which involves the open and deliberate breaking of a law to gain publicity. Many anarchists dislike it, because it also involves the open and deliberate invitation of punishment, which offends anarchist feelings about any kind of voluntary contact with the au-



probably broadcast most effectively in the form of implicit morals to stories. The same is true of such media as the cinema and the theatre, which can be used for extremely effective propaganda in skilful hands. In general, however, anarchists have not been able to make as much of these channels of communication as one might hope.

Anyway, however effective propaganda by speech may be, the written word is necessary to fill out the message, and this has been and still is by far the most common form of propaganda. The idea of society without government may have existed underground for centuries and occasionally come to the surface in radical popular movements, but it was first brought out into the open for thousands of people by the books of such writers as Paine, Godwin, Proudhon, Stirner and so on. And when the idea took root and was expressed by organised groups, there began that flood of periodicals and pamphlets which is still the main method of communication in the anarchist movement. Some of these publications have been very good; most have been rather bad; but they have all been essential in making sure that the movement has not turned in on itself but has maintained a constant dialogue with the external world. Again, as well as producing specifically anarchist works, it is also worth contributing to non-anarchist periodicals and writing non-anarchist books to put an anarchist point of view to non-anarchist readers.

But the spoken and written word, though necessary, are never sufficient. We can talk and write in general terms as much we like, but by itself that will get us nowhere. It is also necessary to move beyond mere propaganda, in two ways—to discuss particular issues at such a time and in such a manner as to have an immediate effect, or to win publicity by something more dramatic than mere words. The first way is agitation, the second is propaganda by deed.

Agitation is the point at which a political theory encounters political reality. Anarchist agitation becomes suitable when people are made especially receptive to anarchist ideas because of some

isation of freedom versus equality—according to which we are told that more freedom equals less equality, and more equality equals less freedom—anarchists point out that in practice you cannot have one without the other. Freedom is not genuine if some people are too poor or too weak to enjoy it, and equality is not genuine if some people are ruled by others. The crucial contribution to political theory made by anarchists is this realisation that freedom and equality are in the end the same thing...

Anarchism also departs from both liberalism and socialism in taking a different view of progress. Liberals see history as a linear development from savagery, superstition, intolerance and tyranny to civilisation, enlightenment, tolerance and emancipation. There are advances and retreats, but the true progress of mankind is from a bad past to a good future. Socialists see history as a dialectical development from savagery, through despotism, feudalism and capitalism, to the triumph of the proletariat and the abolition of the class system. There are revolutions and reactions, but the true progress of mankind is again from a bad past to a good future.

Anarchists see progress quite differently; in fact they often do not see progress at all. We see history not as a linear or a dialectical development in one direction, but as a dualistic process. The history of all human society is the story of a struggle between the rulers and the ruled, between the haves and the have-nots, between the people who want to govern and be governed and the people who want to free themselves and their fellows; the principles of authority and liberty, of government and rebellion, of state and society, are in perpetual opposition. This tension is never resolved; the movement of mankind is now in one direction, now in another. The rise of a new regime or the fall of an old one is not a mysterious break in development or an even more mysterious part of development, but is exactly what it seems to be. Historical events are welcome only to the extent that they increase freedom and equality for the whole people; there is no hidden reason for calling a bad thing good because it is inevitable. We cannot make any useful predic-

tions of the future, and we cannot be sure that the world is going to get better. Our only hope is that, as knowledge and consciousness increase, people will become more aware that they can look after themselves without any need for authority.

Nevertheless, anarchism does derive from liberalism and socialism both historically and ideologically. Liberalism and socialism came before anarchism, and anarchism arose from the contradiction between them; most anarchists still begin as either liberals or socialists, or both. The spirit of revolt is seldom born fully grown, and it generally grows into rather than within anarchism. In a sense, anarchists always remain liberals and socialists, and whenever they reject what is good in either they betray anarchism itself. On one hand we depend on freedom of speech, assembly, movement, behaviour, and especially on the freedom to differ; on the other hand we depend on equality of possessions, on human solidarity, and especially on the sharing of power. We are liberals but more so, and socialists but more so.

Yet anarchism is not just a mixture of liberalism and socialism; that is social democracy, or welfare capitalism, the system which prevails in this country. Whatever we owe to and however close we are to liberals and socialists, we differ fundamentally from them—and from social democrats—in rejecting the institution of government. Both liberals and socialists depend on government—liberals ostensibly to preserve freedom but actually to prevent equality, socialists ostensibly to preserve equality but actually to prevent freedom. Even the most extreme liberals and socialists cannot do without government, the exercise of authority by some people over other people. The essence of anarchism, the one thing without which it is not anarchism, is the negation of authority over anyone by anyone.

or political matters they will put the libertarian point of view, and in struggles over public issues they will support the libertarian solution. But to make a real impact it is necessary to work with other anarchists or in some kind of political group on a more permanent basis than chance encounter. This is the beginning of organisation, leading to propaganda, and finally to action

## Organisation and propaganda

The initial form of anarchist organisation is a discussion group. If this proves viable, it will develop in two ways—it will establish links with other groups, and it will begin wider activity. Links with other groups may eventually lead to some sort of federation which can co-ordinate activity and undertake more ambitious enterprises. Anarchist activity normally begins with some form of propaganda to get across the basic idea of anarchism itself. There are two main ways of doing this—propaganda by word and propaganda by deed.

The word may be written or spoken. Nowadays the spoken word is heard less than it used to be, but public meetings—whether indoors or in the open—are still a valuable method of reaching people directly. The final stage in becoming an anarchist is normally precipitated by some kind of personal contact, and a meeting is a good opportunity for this. As well as holding specifically anarchist meetings, it is also worth attending other meetings to put an anarchist point of view, whether by taking part in the proceedings or by interrupting them.

The most sophisticated vehicle for the spoken word nowadays is of course radio and television, and anarchists have occasionally managed to get a hearing on some programmes. But broadcasting is in fact a rather unsatisfactory medium for propaganda, because it is unsuitable for conveying unfamiliar ideas, and anarchism is still an unfamiliar idea for most listeners and viewers; it is also unsuitable for conveying explicit political ideas, and anarchism is

## What Anarchists Do

The first thing anarchists do is to think and talk. Few people begin as anarchists, and becoming an anarchist tends to be a confusing experience which involves a considerable emotional and intellectual upheaval. Being a conscious anarchist is a continuously difficult situation (rather like being, say, an atheist in medieval Europe); it is difficult to break through the thought-barrier and persuade people that the necessity for government (like the existence of God) is not self-evident but may be discussed and even rejected. An anarchist has to work out a whole new view of the world and a new way of dealing with it; this is usually done in conversation with people who are anarchists or are near to anarchism, especially within some left-wing group or activity.

Afterwards, even the most single-minded anarchist has contact with non-anarchists, and such contact is inevitably an opportunity for spreading anarchist ideas. Among family and friends, at home and at work, any anarchist who is not entirely philosophical in his convictions is bound to be influenced by them. It is not universal but it is usual for anarchists to be less worried than other people about such things as faithfulness in their spouses, obedience in their children, conformity in their neighbours, or punctuality in their colleagues. Anarchist employees and citizens are less likely to do what they are told, and anarchist teachers and parents are less likely to make others do what they are told. Anarchism which does not show in personal life is pretty unreliable.

Some anarchists are content with making up their own minds and confining their opinions to their own lives, but most want to go further and influence other people. In conversation about social

## Democracy and representation

Many people oppose undemocratic government, but anarchists differ from them in also opposing democratic government. Some people oppose democratic government as well, but anarchists differ from them in doing so not because they fear or hate the rule of the people but because they believe that democracy is not the rule of the people—that democracy is in fact a logical contradiction, a physical impossibility. Genuine democracy is possible only in a small community where everyone can take part in every decision; and then it is not necessary. What is called democracy and is alleged to be the government of the people by themselves is in fact the government of the people by elected rulers and would be better called “consenting oligarchy”.

Government by rulers whom we have chosen is different from and generally better than government by rulers who have chosen themselves, but it is still government of some people by other people. Even the most democratic government still depends on someone making someone else do something or stopping someone else doing something. Even when we are governed by our representatives we are still governed, and as soon as they begin to govern us against our will they cease to be our representatives. Most people now agree that we have no obligation to a government in which we have no voice; anarchists go further and insist that we have no obligation to a government we have chosen. We may obey it because we agree with it or because we are too weak to disobey it, but we have no obligation to obey it when we disagree with it and are strong enough not to do so. Most people now agree that those who are involved in any change should be consulted about it before any decision is made; anarchists go further and insist that they should themselves make the decision and go on to put it into effect.

So anarchists reject the idea of a social contract and the idea of representation. In practice, no doubt, most things will always

be done by a few people—by those who are interested in a problem and are capable of solving it—but there is no need for them to be selected or elected. They will always emerge anyway, and it is better for them to do so naturally. The point is that leaders and experts do not have to be rulers, that leadership and expertise are not necessarily connected with authority. And when representation is convenient, that is all it is; the only true representative is the delegate or deputy who is mandated by those who send him and who is subject to instant recall by them. In some ways the ruler who claims to be a representative is worse than the ruler who is obviously a usurper, because it is more difficult to grapple with authority when it is wrapped up in fine words and abstract arguments. The fact that we are able to vote for our rulers once every few years does not mean that we have to obey them for the rest of the time. If we do, it is for practical reasons, not on moral grounds. Anarchists are against government, however it is built up.

## **State and class**

Anarchists have traditionally concentrated their opposition to authority on the state—that is, the institution which claims the monopoly of power within a certain area. This is because the state is the supreme example of authority in a society and also the source or confirmation of the use of authority throughout it. Moreover, anarchists have traditionally opposed all kinds of state—not just the obvious tyranny of a king, dictator or conqueror, but also such variations as enlightened despotism, progressive monarchy, feudal or commercial oligarchy, parliamentary democracy, soviet communism, and so on. Anarchists have even tended to say that all states are the same, and that there is nothing to choose between them.

This is an oversimplification. All states are certainly authoritarian, but some states are just as certainly more authoritarian than others, and every normal person would prefer to live under a less

never threaten the basic structure of society. The difficulty is that what anarchists want is revolutionary, but a revolution will not necessarily—or even probably—lead to what anarchists want. This is why anarchists have tended to resort to desperate actions or to relapse into hopeless inactivity.

In practice most disputes between reformist and revolutionary anarchists are meaningless, for only the wildest revolutionary refuses to welcome reforms and only the mildest reformist refuses to welcome revolutions, and all revolutionaries know that their work will generally lead to no more than reform and all reformists know that their work is generally leading to some kind of revolution. What most anarchists want is a constant pressure of all kinds, bringing about the conversion of individuals, the formation of groups, the reform of institutions, the rising of the people, and the destruction of authority and property. If this happened without trouble, we would be delighted; but it never has, and it probably never will. In the end it is necessary to go out and confront the forces of the state in the neighbourhood, at work, and in the streets—and if the state is defeated it is even more necessary to go on working to prevent the establishment of a new state and to begin the construction of a free society instead. There is a place for everyone in this process, and all anarchists find something to do in the struggle for what they want.

would not normally work or buy for someone else's benefit rather than their own; and while no law would prevent appropriation, no law would prevent expropriation either—you could take something from someone, but he could take it back again. Authority and property could hardly be restored by isolated individuals.

A greater danger would come from independent groups. A separate community could easily exist within society, and this might cause severe strains; if such a community reverted to authority and property, which might raise the standard of living of the few, there would be a temptation for people to join the secession, especially if society at large were going through a bad time.

But a free society would have to be pluralist and put up with not only differences of opinion about how freedom and equality should be put into practice but also deviations from the theory of freedom and equality altogether. The only condition would be that no one is forced to join such tendencies against his will, and here some kind of authoritarian pressure would have to be available to protect even the most libertarian society. But anarchists want to replace mass society by a mass of societies, all living together as freely as the individuals within them. The greatest danger to the free societies that have been established has been not internal regression but external aggression, and the real problem is not so much how to keep a free society going as how to get it going in the first place.

## Revolution or reform

Anarchists have traditionally advocated a violent revolution to establish a free society, but some have rejected violence or revolution or both—violence is so often followed by counter-violence and revolution by counter-revolution. On the other hand, few anarchists have advocated mere reform, realising that while the system of authority and property exists superficial changes will

authoritarian rather than a more authoritarian one. To give a simple example, this statement of anarchism could not have been published under most states of the past, and it still could not be published under most states of both left and right, in both East and West; I would rather live where it can be published, and so would most of my readers.

Few anarchists still have such a simplistic attitude to an abstract thing called “the state”, and anarchists concentrate on attacking the central government and the institutions which derive from it not just because they are part of the state but because they are the extreme examples of the use of authority in society. We contrast the state with society, but we no longer see it as alien to society, as an artificial growth; instead we see it as part of society, as a natural growth. Authority is a normal form of behaviour, just as aggression is; but it is a form of behaviour which must be controlled and grown out of. This will not be done by trying to find ways of institutionalising it, but only by finding ways of doing without it.

Anarchists object to the obviously repressive institutions of government—officials, laws, police, courts, prisons, armies, and so on—and also to those which are apparently benevolent—subsidised bodies and local councils, nationalised industries and public corporations, banks and insurance companies, schools and universities, press and broadcasting, and all the rest. Anyone can see that the former depend not on consent but on compulsion and ultimately on force; anarchists insist that the latter have the same iron hand, even if it does wear a velvet glove.

Nevertheless, the institutions which derive directly or indirectly from the state cannot be understood if they are thought of as being purely bad. They can have a good side, in two ways. They have a useful negative function when they challenge the use of authority by other institutions, such as cruel parents, greedy landlords, brutal bosses, violent criminals; and they have a useful positive function when they promote desirable social activities, such as public works, disaster operations, communication and transport systems,

art and culture, medical services, pension schemes, poor relief, education, broadcasting. Thus we have the liberatory state and the welfare state, the state working for freedom and the state working for equality.

The first anarchist answer to this is that we also have the oppressive state—that the main function of the state is in fact to hold down the people, to limit freedom—and that all the benevolent functions of the state can be exercised and often have been exercised by voluntary associations. Here the state resembles the medieval church. In the Middle Ages the church was involved in all essential social activities, and it was difficult to believe that the activities were possible without it. Only the church could baptise, marry and bury people, and they had to learn that it did not actually control birth, love and death. Every public act needed an official religious blessing—many still have one—and people had to learn that the act was just as effective without the blessing. The church interfered in and often controlled those aspects of communal life which are now dominated by the state. People have learnt to realise that the participation of the church is unnecessary and even harmful; what they now have to learn is that the domination of the state is equally pernicious and superfluous. We need the state just as long as we think we do, and everything it does can be done just as well or even better without the sanction of authority.

The second anarchist answer is that the essential function of the state is to maintain the existing inequality. Anarchists do not agree with Marxists that the basic unit of society is the class, but most agree that the state is the political expression of the economic structure, that it is the representative of the people who own or control the wealth of the community and the oppressor of the people who do the work which creates that wealth. The state cannot redistribute wealth fairly because it is the main agency of the unfair distribution. Anarchists agree with Marxists that the present system must be destroyed, but they do not agree that the future system can be established by a state in different hands; the state

The treatment of delinquency has also progressed a long way, but it is still far from satisfactory. Anarchists have two characteristic ideas about delinquency: the first is that most so-called criminals are much the same as other people, just poorer, weaker, sillier or unluckier; the second is that people who persistently hurt other people should not be hurt in turn but should be looked after. The biggest criminals are not burglars but bosses, not gangsters but rulers, not murderers but mass-murderers. A few minor injustices are exposed and punished by the state, while the many major injustices of present society are disguised and actually perpetrated by the state. In general punishment does more damage to society than crime does; it is more extensive, better organised, and much more effective. Nevertheless, even the most libertarian society would have to protect itself against some people, and this would inevitably involve some compulsion. But proper treatment of delinquency would be part of the education and health system, and would not become an institutionalised system of punishment. The last resort would not be imprisonment or death, but boycott or expulsion.

## Pluralism

This might work the other way. An individual or a group might refuse to join or insist on leaving the best possible society; there would be nothing to stop him. In theory it is possible for a man to support himself by his own efforts, though in practice he would depend on the community to provide some materials and to take some products in exchange, so it is difficult to be literally self-sufficient. A collectivist or communist society should tolerate and even encourage such pockets of individualism. What would be unacceptable would be an independent person trying to exploit other people's labour by employing them at unfair wages or exchanging goods at unfair prices. This should not happen, because people

a good primary or comprehensive school, or a good adventure playground or youth club. But even the best educational system is still “under the control of people in authority—teachers, administrators, governors, officials, inspectors, and so on. The adults concerned in any educational process are bound to dominate it to some extent, but there is no need for them—let alone people not directly concerned in it at all—to control it.

Anarchists want the current educational reforms to go much further. Not only should strict discipline and corporal punishment be abolished—so should all imposed discipline and all penal methods. Not only should educational institutions be freed from the power of outside authorities, but students should be freed from the power of teachers or administrators. In a healthy education relationship the fact that one person knows more than another is no reason for the teacher having authority over the learner. The status of teachers in present society is based on age, strength, experience, and law; the only status teachers should have would be based on their knowledge of a subject and their ability to teach it, and ultimately on their capacity to inspire admiration and respect. What is needed is not so much student power—though that is a useful corrective to teachers’ power and bureaucrats’ power—as workers’ control by all the people involved in an educational institution. The essential point is to break the link between teaching and governing and to make education free.

This break is actually nearer in health than in education. Doctors are no longer magicians and nurses are no longer saints, and in many countries—including Britain—the right of free medical treatment is accepted. What is needed is the extension of the principle of freedom from the economic to the political side of the health system. People should be able to go to hospital without any payment, and people should also be able to work in hospitals without any hierarchy. Once again, what is needed is workers’ control by all the people involved in a medical institution. And just as education is for students, so health is for patients.

is a cause as well as a result of the class system, and a classless society which is established by a state will soon become a class society again. The state will not wither away—it must be deliberately abolished by people taking power away from the rulers and wealth away from the rich; these two actions are linked, and one without the other will always be futile. Anarchy in its truest sense means a society without either rulers or rich men.

## **Organisation and bureaucracy**

This does not mean that anarchists reject organisation, though here is one of the strongest prejudices about anarchism. People can accept that anarchy may not mean just chaos or confusion, and that anarchists want not disorder but order without government, but they are sure that anarchy means order which arises spontaneously and that anarchists do not want organisation. This is the reverse of the truth. Anarchists actually want much more organisation, though organisation without authority. The prejudice about anarchism derives from a prejudice about organisation; people cannot see that organisation does not depend on authority, that it actually works best without authority.

A moment’s thought will show that when compulsion is replaced by consent there will have to be more discussion and planning, not less. Everyone who is involved in a decision will be able to take part in making it, and no one will be able to leave the work to paid officials or elected representatives. Without rules to observe or precedents to follow, every decision will have to be made afresh. Without rulers to obey or leaders to follow, everyone will be able to make up his own mind. To keep all this going, the multiplicity and complexity of links between individuals will be increased, not reduced. Such organisation may be untidy and inefficient, but it will be much closer to the needs and feelings of the people concerned. If something cannot be done without the

old kind of organisation, without authority and compulsion, it probably isn't worth doing and would be better left undone.

What anarchists do reject is the institutionalisation of organisation, the establishment of a special group of people whose function is to organise other people. Anarchist organisation would be fluid and open; as soon as organisation becomes hardened and closed, it falls into the hands of a bureaucracy, becomes the instrument of a particular class, and reverts to the expression of authority instead of the coordination of society. Every group tends towards oligarchy, the rule of the few, and every organisation tends towards bureaucracy, the rule of the professionals; anarchists must always struggle against these tendencies, in the future as well as the present, and among themselves as well as among others.

## Property

Nor do anarchists reject property, though we have a peculiar view of it. In one sense property is theft—that is, the exclusive appropriation of anything by anyone is a deprivation of everyone else. This does not mean that we are all communists; what it means is that any particular person's right to any particular thing depends not on whether he made it or found it or bought it or was given it or is using it or wants it or has a legal right to it, but on whether he *needs* it—and, more to the point, whether he needs it more than someone else. This is a matter not of abstract justice or natural law, but of human solidarity and obvious commonsense. If I have a loaf of bread and you are hungry, it is yours, not mine, if I have a coat and you are cold, it belongs to you. If I have a house and you have none, you have the right to use at least one of my rooms. But in another sense property is liberty—that is, the private enjoyment of goods and chattels in a sufficient quantity is an essential condition of the good life for the individual.

There are plenty of clothes, and there could be plenty of everything else too.

Luxuries, by a strange paradox, are also necessities, though not basic necessities. The second task of a healthy society is to make luxuries freely available as well, though this may be a place where money would still have a useful function—provided it were not distributed according to the ludicrous lack of system in capitalist countries, or the even more ludicrous system in communist ones. The essential point is that everyone should have free and equal access to luxury.

But man does not live by bread alone, or even by cake. Anarchists would not like to see recreational, intellectual, cultural, and other such activities in the hands of society—even the most libertarian society. But there are other activities which cannot be left to individuals in free associations but must be handled by society as a whole. These are what may be called welfare activities—mutual aid beyond the reach of family and friends and outside the place of residence or work. Let us consider three of these.

## The welfare society

Education is very important in human society, because we take so long to grow and take so long learning facts and skills necessary for social life, and anarchists have always been much concerned about the problems of education. Many anarchist leaders have made valuable contributions to educational theory and practice, and many educational reformers have had libertarian tendencies—from Rousseau and Pestalozzi to Montessori and Neill. Ideas about education which were once thought of as utopian are now a normal part of the curriculum both inside and outside the state educational system in Britain, and education is perhaps the most stimulating area of society for practical anarchists. When people say that anarchy sounds nice but cannot work, we can point to



of the whole people instead of to increase the profits and power of the rich and strong.

## **Necessities and luxuries**

A society with any pretension to decency cannot allow the exploitation of basic needs. It may be acceptable for luxuries to be bought and sold, since we have a choice whether we use them or not; but necessities are not mere commodities, since we have no choice about using them. If anything should be taken off the commercial market and out of the hands of exclusive groups, it is surely the land we live on, the food which grows on it, the homes which are built on it, and those essential things which make up the material basis of human life—clothes, tools, amenities, fuel, and so on. It is also surely obvious that when there is plenty of any necessity everyone should be able to take what he needs; but that when there is a scarcity, there should be a freely agreed system of rationing so that everyone gets a fair share. It is clear that there is something wrong with any system in which waste and want exist side by side, in which some people have more than they need while other people go without.

Above all it is clear that the first task of a healthy society is to eliminate the scarcity of necessities—such as the lack of food in undeveloped countries and the lack of housing in advanced countries—by the proper use of technical knowledge and of social resources. If the available skill and labour in Britain were used properly, for instance, there is no reason why enough food could not be grown and enough homes could not be built to feed and house the whole population. It does not happen now because present society has other priorities, not because it cannot happen. At one time it was assumed that it was impossible for everyone to be clothed properly, and poor people always wore rags; now there

Anarchists are in favour of the private property which cannot be used by one person to exploit another—those personal possessions which we accumulate from childhood and which become part of our lives. What we are against is the public property which is no use in itself and can be used only to exploit people—land and buildings, instruments of production and distribution, raw materials and manufactured articles, money and capital. The principle at issue is that a man may be said to have a right to what he produces by his own labour, but not to what he gets from the labour of others; he has a right to what he needs and uses, but not to what he does not need and cannot use. As soon as a man has more than enough, it either goes to waste or it stops another man having enough.

This means that rich men have no right to their property, for they are rich not because they work a lot but because a lot of people work for them; and poor men have a right to rich men's property, for they are poor not because they work little but because they work for others. Indeed, poor people almost always work longer hours at duller jobs in worse conditions than rich people. No one ever became rich or remained rich through his own labour, only by exploiting the labour of others. A man may have a house and a piece of land, the tools of his trade and good health all his life, and he may work as hard as he can as long as he can—he will produce enough for his family, but little more; and even then he will not be really self-sufficient, for he will depend on others to provide some of his materials and to take some of his produce in exchange.

Public property is not only a matter of ownership, but also one of control. It is not necessary to possess property to be able to exploit others. Rich men have always used other people to manage their property, and, now that anonymous corporations and state enterprises are replacing individual property owners, managers are becoming the leading exploiters of other people's labour. In both advanced and backward countries, both capitalist and communist states, a tiny minority of the population still owns or otherwise controls the overwhelming proportion of public property.

Despite appearances, this is not an economic or legal problem. What matters is not the distribution of money or the system of land tenure or the organisation of taxation or the method of taxation or the law of inheritance, but the basic fact that some people will work for other people, just as some people will obey other people. If we refused to work for the rich and powerful, property would disappear—in the same way that, if we refused to obey rulers, authority would disappear. For anarchists, property is based on authority, and not the other way round. The point is not how peasants put food into the landlords' mouths or how workers put money into the bosses' pockets, but *why* they do so, and this is a political point.

Some people try to solve the problem of property by changing the law or the government, whether by reform or by revolution. Anarchists have no faith in such solutions, but they do not all agree on the right solution. Some anarchists want the division of everything among everyone, so that we all have an equal share in the world's wealth, and a laissez-faire commercial system with free credit to prevent excessive accumulation. But most anarchists have no faith in this solution either, and want the expropriation of all public property from those who have more than they need, so that we all have equal access to the world's wealth, and the control is in the hands of the whole community. But at least it is agreed that the present system of property must be destroyed together with the present system of authority.

## God and church

Anarchists have traditionally been anti-clerical, and also atheist. The early anarchists were opposed to the church as much as to the state, and most of them have been opposed to religion itself. The slogan, "Neither God nor master", has often been used to sum up the anarchist message. Many people still take the first step towards anarchism by abandoning their faith and becoming rationalists or

trade unions or a working-class party (that is, a party claiming to represent the working class)—runs the economy and has ultimate control of work. Nor does it mean the same thing on a smaller scale, that the staff of a factory can elect managers or see the accounts. It means quite simply that the people doing a particular job are in direct and total control of what they do, without any bosses or managers or inspectors at all. Some people may be good co-ordinators, and they can concentrate on co-ordination, but there is no need for them to have power over the people who do the actual work. Some people may be lazy or inefficient, but they are already. The point is to have the greatest possible control over one's own work, as well as one's own life.

This principle applies to all kinds of work—in fields as well as factories, in large concerns as well as small, in unskilled as well as skilled occupations, and in dirty jobs as well as liberal professions—and it is not just a useful gesture to make workers happy but a fundamental principle of any kind of free economy. An obvious objection is that complete workers' control would lead to wasteful competition between different workplaces and to production of unwanted things; an obvious answer is that complete lack of workers' control leads to exactly the same things. What is needed is intelligent planning, and despite what most people seem to think, this depends not on more control from above but on more information below.

Most economists have been concerned with production rather than consumption—with the manufacture of tilings rather than their use. Right-wingers and left-wingers both want workers to produce more, whether to make the rich richer or to make the state stronger, and the result is "overproduction" alongside poverty, growing productivity together with growing unemployment, higher blocks of offices at the same time as increasing homelessness, greater yields of crops per acre when more acres are left uncultivated. Anarchists are concerned with consumption rather than production—with the use of things to satisfy the needs

## Work

The first need of man is for food, shelter and clothing which make life livable; the second is for the further comforts which make life worth living. The prime economic activity of any human group is the production and distribution of the things which satisfy these needs; and the most important aspect of a society—after the personal relations on which it is based—is the organisation of the necessary work. Anarchists have two characteristic ideas about work: the first is that most work is unpleasant but could be organised to be more bearable and even pleasurable; and the second is that all work should be organised by the people who actually do it.

Anarchists agree with Marxists that work in present society alienates the worker. It is not his life, but what he does to be able to live; his life is what he does outside work, and when he does something he enjoys he does not call it work. This is true of most work for most people in all places, and it is bound to be true of a lot of work for a lot of people at all times. The tiring and repetitive labour which has to be done to make plants grow and animals thrive, to run production lines and transport systems, to get to people what they want and to take from them what they do not want, could not be abolished without a drastic decline in the material standard of living; and automation, which can make it less tiring, makes it even more repetitive. But anarchists insist that the solution is not to condition people into believing that the situation is inevitable, but to reorganise essential labour so that, in the first place, it is normal for everyone who is capable of it to take a share in doing it, and for no one to spend more than a few hours a day on it; and so that, in the second place, it is possible for everyone to alternate between different kinds of boring labour, which would become less boring through greater variety. It is a matter not just of fair shares for all, but also of fair work for all.

Anarchists also agree with syndicalists that work should be run by the workers. This does not mean that the working class—or the

humanists; the rejection of divine authority encourages the rejection of human authority. Nearly all anarchists today are probably atheists, or at least agnostics.

But there have been religious anarchists, though they are usually outside the mainstream of the anarchist movement. Obvious examples are the heretical sects which anticipated some anarchist ideas before the nineteenth century, and groups of religious pacifists in Europe and North America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially Tolstoy and his followers at the beginning of the twentieth century and the Catholic Worker movement in the United States since the 1930s.

The general anarchist hatred of religion has declined as the power of the church has declined, and most anarchists now think of it as a personal matter. They would oppose the discouragement of religion by force, but they would also oppose the revival of religion by force. They would let anyone believe and do what he wants, so long as it affects only himself; but they would not let the church have any more power.

In the meantime, the history of religion is a model for the history of government. Once it was thought impossible to have a society without God; now God is dead. It is still thought impossible to have a society without the state; now we must destroy the state.

## War and violence

Anarchists have always opposed war, but not all have opposed violence. They are anti-militarists, but not necessarily pacifists. For anarchists, war is the supreme example of authority outside a society, and at the same time a powerful reinforcement of authority within society. The organised violence and destruction of war are an enormously magnified version of the organised violence and destruction of the state, and war is the health of the state. The anarchist movement has a strong tradition of resistance to war and to

preparations for war. A few anarchists have supported some wars, but they have always been recognised as renegades by their comrades, and this total opposition to national wars is one of the great unifying factors among anarchists.

But anarchists have distinguished between national wars between states and civil wars between classes. The revolutionary anarchist movement since the late nineteenth century has called for a violent insurrection to destroy the state, and anarchists have taken an active part in many armed risings and civil wars, especially those in Russia and Spain. Though they were involved in such fighting, however, they were under no illusions that it would itself bring about the revolution. Violence might be necessary for the work of destroying the old system, but it was useless and indeed dangerous for the work of building a new system. A people's army can defeat a ruling class and destroy a government, but it cannot help the people to create a free society, and it is no good winning a war if you cannot win the peace.

Many anarchists have in fact doubted whether violence plays any useful part at all. Like the state, it is not a neutral force whose effects depend on who uses it, and it will not do the right things just because it is in the right hands. Of course the violence of the oppressed is not the same as the violence of the oppressor, but even when it is the best way out of an intolerable situation it is only a second best. It is one of the most unpleasant features of present society, and it remains unpleasant however good its purpose; moreover, it tends to destroy its purpose, even in situations where it seems appropriate—such as revolution. The experience of history suggests that revolutions are not guaranteed by violence; on the contrary, the more violence, the less revolution.

All this may seem absurd to people who are not anarchists. One of the oldest and most persistent prejudices about anarchism is that anarchists are above all men of violence. The stereotype of the anarchist with a bomb under his cloak is eighty years old, but it is still going strong. Many anarchists have indeed favoured violence,

shared among the people involved. Anarchists differ about which system is best, and no doubt the members of a free society would also differ; it would be up to the people in each association to adopt whichever method they preferred. There might be equal pay for all, or pay according to need, or no pay at all. Some associations might use money for all exchange, some just for large or complex transactions, and some might not use it at all. Goods might be bought, or hired, or rationed, or free. If this sort of speculation seems absurdly unrealistic or utopian, it may be worth remembering just how much we already hold in common, and how many things may be used without payment.

In Britain, the community owns some heavy industries, air and rail transport, ferries and buses, broadcasting systems, water, gas and electricity, though we pay to use them; but roads, bridges, rivers, beaches, parks, libraries, playgrounds, lavatories, schools, universities, hospitals and emergency services are not only owned by the community but may be used without payment. The distinction between what is owned privately and what is owned communally, and between what may be used for payment and what may be used freely, is quite arbitrary. It may seem obvious that we should be able to use roads and beaches v/ithout payment, but this was not always the case, and the free use of hospitals and universities has come only during this century. In the same way, it may seem obvious that we should pay for transport and fuel, but this may not always be the case, and there is no reason why they should not be free.

One result of the equal division or free distribution of wealth rather than the accumulation of property would be the end of the class system based on ownership. But anarchists also want to end the class system based on control. This would mean constant vigilance to prevent the growth of bureaucracy in every association, and above all it would mean the reorganisation of work without a managerial class.

tion and by career bureaucrats who are virtually unmovable, anarchists want co-ordination by temporary delegates who are subject to instant recall and by professional experts who are genuinely accountable. In such a system, all those social activities which involve organisation would probably be managed by free associations. These might be called councils or co-operatives or collectives or communes or committees or unions or syndicates or soviets, or anything else—their title would be irrelevant, the important thing would be their function.

There would be work associations from the workshop or small-holding up to the largest industrial or agricultural complex, to handle the production and transport of goods, decide conditions of work, and run the economy. There would be area associations from the neighbourhood or village up to the largest residential unit, to handle the life of the community—housing, streets, refuse, amenities. There would be associations to handle the social aspects of such activities as communications, culture, recreation, research, health and education.

One result of co-ordination by free association rather than administration by established hierarchies would be extreme decentralisation on federalist lines. This may seem an argument against anarchism, but we would say that it is an argument for it. One of the oddest things about modern political thought is that wars are often blamed on the existence of many small nations when the worst wars in history have been caused by a few large ones. In the same way, governments are always trying to create larger and larger administrative units when observation suggests that the best ones are small. The breakdown of big political systems would be one of the greatest benefits of anarchism, and countries could become cultural entities once more, while nations would disappear.

The association concerned with any kind of wealth or property would have the crucial responsibility of either making sure that it was fairly divided among the people involved or else of holding it in common and making sure that the use of it was fairly

some have favoured the assassination of public figures, and a few have even favoured terrorism of the population, to help destroy the present system. There is a dark side to anarchism, and there is no point denying it. But it is only one side of anarchism, and a small one. Most anarchists have always opposed any violence which is not really necessary—the inevitable violence occurs when the people shake off their rulers and exploiters.

The main perpetrators of violence have been those who maintain authority, not those who attack it. The great bomb-throwers have not been the tragic individuals driven to desperation in southern Europe more than half a century ago, but the military machines of every state in the world throughout history. No anarchist can rival the Blitz and the Bomb, no Ravachol or Bonnot can stand beside Hitler or Stalin. We would encourage workers to seize their factory or peasants to seize their land, and we might break windows or build barricades; but we have no soldiers, no aeroplanes, no police, no prisons, no camps, no firing squads, no gas chambers, no hangmen. For anarchists, violence is the extreme example of the use of power by one person against another, the culmination of everything we are against.

Some anarchists have even been pacifists, though this is not usual. Many pacifists have been (or become) anarchists, and anarchists have tended to move towards pacifism as the world has moved towards destruction. Some have been especially attracted by the militant type of pacifism advocated by Tolstoy and Gandhi and by the use of nonviolence as a technique of direct action, and many anarchists have taken part in anti-war movements and have sometimes had a significant influence on them. But most anarchists—even those who are closely involved—find pacifism too wide in its rejection of all violence by all people in all circumstances, and too narrow in its belief that the elimination of violence alone will make a fundamental difference to society. Where pacifists see authority as a weaker version of violence, anarchists see violence as a stronger version of authority. They

are also repelled by the moralistic side of pacifism, the asceticism and selfrighteousness, and by its tender-minded view of the world. To repeat, they are anti-militarists, but not necessarily pacifists.

## The individual and society

The basic unit of mankind is man, the individual human being. Nearly all individuals live in society, but society is nothing more than a collection of individuals, and its only purpose is to give them a full life. Anarchists do not believe that people have natural rights, but this applies to everyone; an individual has no right to do anything, but no other individual has a right to stop him doing anything. There is no general will, no social norm to which we should conform. We are equal, but not identical. Competition and mutual aid, aggression and tenderness, intolerance and tolerance, violence and gentleness, authority and rebellion—all these are natural forms of social behaviour, but some help and others hinder the full life of the individuals. Anarchists believe that the best way to guarantee it is to secure equal freedom for every member of society.

We therefore have no time for morality in the traditional sense, and we are not interested in what people do in their own lives. Let every individual do exactly what he wants', within the limits of his natural capacity, provided he lets every other individual do exactly what *he* wants. Such things as dress, appearance, speech, manners, acquaintance, and so on, are matters of personal preference. So is sex. We are in favour of free love, but this does not mean that we advocate universal promiscuity; it means that all love is free, except prostitution and rape, and that people should be able to choose (or reject) forms of sexual behaviour and sexual partners for themselves. Extreme indulgence may suit one person, extreme chastity another—though most anarchists feel that the world would be a better place if there had been a lot less fussing and a lot more fucking. The same principle applies to such things as drugs. Peo-

No doubt most people will go on practising some form of marriage and most children will be brought up in a family environment, whatever happens to society, but there could be a great variety of personal arrangements within a single community. The fundamental requirement is that women should be freed from the oppression of men and that children should be freed from that of parents. The exercise of authority is no better in the microcosm of the family than in the macrocosm of society.

Personal relationships outside the family would be regulated not by arbitrary laws or economic competition but by the natural solidarity of the human species. Almost all of us know how to treat our fellow-men—as we would like them to treat us—and self-respect and public opinion are far better guides to action than fear or guilt. Some opponents of anarchism have suggested that the moral oppression of society would be worse than the physical oppression of the state, but a greater danger is surely the unregulated authority of the vigilante group, the lynch mob, the robber band, or the criminal gang—the rudimentary forms of the state which come to the surface when the regulated authority of the real state is for some reason absent.

But anarchists disagree little about private life, and there is not much of a problem here. After all a great many people have already made their own new arrangements, without waiting for a revolution or anything else. All that is needed for the liberation of the individual is the emancipation from old prejudices and the achievement of a certain standard of living. The real problem is the liberation of society.

## The free society

The first priority of a free society would be the abolition of authority and the expropriation of property. In place of government by permanent representatives who are subject to occasional elec-

## What Anarchists Want

It is difficult to say what anarchists want, not just because they differ so much, but because they hesitate to make detailed proposals about a future which they are neither able nor willing to control. After all, anarchists want a society without government, and such a society would obviously vary widely from time to time and from place to place. The whole point of the society anarchists want is that it would be what its members themselves want. Nevertheless, it is possible to say what most anarchists would like to see in a free society, though it must always be remembered that there is no official line, and also no way of reconciling the extremes of individualism and communism.

### The free individual

Most anarchists begin with a libertarian attitude towards private life, and want a much wider choice for personal behaviour and for social relationships between individuals. But if the individual is the atom of society, the family is the molecule, and family life would continue even if all the coercion enforcing it were removed. Nevertheless, though the family may be natural, it is no longer necessary; efficient contraception and intelligent division of labour have released mankind from the narrow choice between celibacy and monogamy. There is no need for a couple to have children, and children could be brought up by more or less than two parents. People could live alone and still have sexual partners and children, or live in communes with no permanent partnerships or official parenthood at all.

People can intoxicate themselves with alcohol or caffeine, cannabis or amphetamine, tobacco or opiates, and we have no right to prevent them, let alone punish them, though we may try to help them. Similarly, let every individual worship in his own way, so long as he lets other individuals worship in their own way, or not worship at all. It doesn't matter if people are offended; what does matter is if people are injured. There is no need to worry about differences in personal behaviour; the thing to worry about is the gross injustice of authoritarian society.

The main enemy of the free individual is the overwhelming power of the state, but anarchists are also opposed to every other form of authority which limits freedom—in the family, in the school, at work, in the neighbourhood—and to every attempt to make the individual conform. However, before considering how society may be organised to give the greatest freedom to its members, it is necessary to describe the various forms anarchism has taken according to the various views of the relationship between the individual and society.

## How Anarchists Differ

Anarchists are notorious for disagreeing with each other, and in the absence of leaders and officials, hierarchies and orthodoxies, punishments and rewards, policies and programmes, it is natural that people whose fundamental principle is the rejection of authority should tend to perpetual dissent. Nevertheless, there are several well-established types of anarchism from which most anarchists have chosen one to express their particular view.

### Philosophic anarchism

The original type of anarchism was what is now called philosophic anarchism. This is the view that the idea of a society without government is beautiful but not really desirable, or desirable but not really possible, at least not yet. Such an attitude dominates all apparently anarchist writing before the 1840s, and it helped to prevent anarchic popular movements from becoming a more serious threat to governments. It is an attitude which is still found among people who call themselves anarchists but remain outside any organised movement, and also among some people inside the anarchist movement. Quite often it seems to be an almost unconscious attitude that anarchism, like the kingdom of God, is within you. It reveals itself sooner or later by some such phrase as, “Of course, I’m an anarchist, *but—*”

Active anarchists tend to despise philosophic anarchists, and this is understandable, though unfortunate. So long as anarchism is a minority movement, a general feeling in favour of anarchist ideas, however vague, creates a climate in which anarchist propaganda

makes sense as far as it goes, but it doesn’t go far enough to deal with life outside work.

### Not so different

It ^ must be said that the differences between various types of anarchism have become less important in recent years. Except for dogmatists at each extreme, most anarchists tend to see the old distinctions as more apparent than real—as artificial differences of emphasis, even of vocabulary, rather than as serious differences of principle. It might in fact be better to think of them as not so much types as aspects of anarchism which depend on the direction of our interests.

Thus in our private lives we are individualists, doing our own things and choosing our companions and friends for personal reasons; in our social lives we are mutualists, making free agreements with each other, and giving what we have and getting what we need by equal exchanges with each other; in our working lives we would mostly be collectivists, joining our colleagues in producing for the common good—and in the management of work we would mostly be syndicalists, joining our colleagues in deciding how the job should be done; in our political lives we would mostly be communists, joining our neighbours in deciding how the community should be run. This is of course a simplification, but it expresses a general truth about the way anarchists think nowadays.



hands of the rank and file, so that the whole economy is managed according to the principle of workers' control.

Most anarchist collectivists and many communists during the nineteenth century were syndicalists by implication, and this was particularly true of the anarchists in the First International. But anarcho-syndicalism was not developed explicitly until the rise of the French syndicalist movement at the end of the century. (The English word "syndicalism" comes from the French word *syndicalisme*, which simply means trade-unionism.) When the French trade-union movement divided into revolutionary and reformist sections in the 1890s, the revolutionary syndicalists became dominant, and many anarchists joined them. Some of these, such as Fernand Pelloutier and Emile Pouget, became influential, and the French syndicalist movement, though never really anarchist, was a powerful force for anarchism until the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Anarcho-syndicalist organisations were also strong in the labour movements of Italy and Russia just after the First World War, and above all in Spain until the end of the Civil War in 1939.

This is an anarchism for the most class-conscious and militant elements in a strong labour movement. But syndicalism is not necessarily anarchist or even revolutionary; in practice anarcho-syndicalists have tended to become authoritarian or reformist, or both, and it has proved difficult to maintain a balance between libertarian principles and the pressures of the day-to-day struggle for better pay and conditions. This is not so much an argument against anarcho-syndicalism as a constant danger for anarcho-syndicalists. The real argument against anarcho-syndicalism and against syndicalism in general is that it overemphasises the importance of work and the function of the working class. The class system is a central political problem but the class struggle is not the only political activity for anarchists. Syndicalism is acceptable when it is seen as one aspect of anarchism but not when it obscures all other aspects. This is a view of man which

is listened to and the anarchist movement can grow. On the other hand an acceptance of philosophic anarchism can inoculate people against an appreciation of real anarchism; but it is at least better than complete indifference. As well as philosophic anarchists, there are many people who are close to us but refuse to call themselves anarchists, and some who refuse to call themselves anything at all. These all have their part to play, if only to provide a sympathetic audience and to work for freedom in their own lives.

## **Individualism, egoism, libertarianism**

The first type of anarchism which was more than merely philosophical was individualism. This is the view that society is not an organism but a collection of autonomous individuals, who have no obligation towards society as a whole but only towards one another. This view existed long before there was any such thing as anarchism, and it has continued to exist quite separately from anarchism. But individualism always tends to assume that the individuals who make up society should be free and equal, and that they can become so only by their own efforts and not through the action of outside institutions; and any development of this attitude obviously brings mere individualism towards real anarchism.

The first person who elaborated a recognisable theory of anarchism—William Godwin, in *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793)—was an individualist. In reaction against the supporters and the opponents of the French Revolution, he postulated a society without government and with as little organisation as possible, in which the sovereign individuals should beware of any form of permanent association; despite many variations, this is still the basis of individualist anarchism. This is an anarchism for intellectuals, artists, and eccentrics, for people who work alone and like to keep themselves to themselves. Ever since Godwin it has attracted such people, especially in Britain and North America,

and has included figures such as Shelley and Wilde, Emerson and Thoreau, Augustus John and Herbert Read. They may call themselves something else, but the individualism always shows through.

It is perhaps misleading to call individualism a type of anarchism, for it has had a profound influence on the whole anarchist movement, and any experience or observation of anarchists shows that it is still an essential part of their ideology, or at least of their motivation. Individualist anarchists are, as it were, the basic anarchists, who simply wish to destroy authority and see no need to put anything in its place. This is a view of man which makes sense as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough to deal with the real problems of society, which surely need social rather than personal action. Alone, we may save ourselves, but others we cannot save.

A more extreme form of individualism is egoism, especially in the form expressed by Max Stirner in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1845)—usually translated as *The Ego and His Own*, though a better rendering would be *The Individual and His Property*. Like Marx or Freud, Stirner is difficult to interpret without offending all his followers; but it is perhaps acceptable to say that his egoism differs from individualism in general by rejecting such abstractions as morality, justice, obligation, reason, and duty, in favour of an intuitive recognition of the existential uniqueness of each individual. It naturally opposes the state, but it also opposes society, and it tends towards nihilism (the view that nothing matters) and solipsism (the view that only oneself exists). It is clearly anarchist, but 111 a rather unproductive way, since any form of organisation beyond a temporary “union of egoists” is seen as the source of new oppression. This is an anarchism for poets and tramps, for people who want an absolute answer and no compromise. It is anarchy here and now, if not in the world, then in one's own life.

A more moderate tendency which derives from individualism is libertarianism. This is in its simplest sense the view that liberty is a good thing; in a stricter sense it is the view that freedom is the

lectivism is revolutionary anarchism concentrating on the problem of work and based on the workers' collective, then communism is revolutionary anarchism concentrating on the problem of life and based on the people's commune.

Since the 1870s, the principle of communism has been accepted by most anarchist organisations favouring revolution. The main exception was the movement in Spain, which retained the principle of collectivism because of strong Bakuninist influence; but in fact its aims were scarcely different from those of other movements, and in practice the “comunismo libertario” established during the Spanish Revolution in 1936 was the most impressive example of anarchist communism in history.

This anarchist or libertarian communism must of course not be confused with the much better known communism of the Marxists—the communism which is based on common ownership of the economy and state control of both production and distribution, and also on party dictatorship. The historical origin of the modern anarchist movement in the dispute with the Marxists in the First and Second Internationals is reflected in the ideological obsession of anarchists with authoritarian communism, and this has been reinforced since the Russian and Spanish revolutions. As a result, many anarchists seem to have called themselves communists not so much from definite conviction but more from a wish to challenge the Marxists on their own ground and outdo them in the eyes of public opinion. One may suspect that anarchists are seldom really communist, partly because they are always too individualist, and partly because they would not wish to lay down elaborate plans for a future which must be free to make its own arrangements.

The type of anarchism which appears when collectivism or communism concentrates exclusively on the problem of work is syndicalism. This is the view that society should be based on trade unions, as the expression of the working class, reorganised so as to cover both occupations and areas, and reform so as to be in the

class-conscious workers and peasants, for militants and activists in the labour movement, for socialists who want liberty as well as equality.

This anarchist or revolutionary collectivism must not be confused with the better known authoritarian and reformist collectivism of the Social Democrats and Fabians—the collectivism which is based on common ownership of the economy but also on state control of production. Partly because of the danger of this confusion, and partly because it is here that anarchists and socialists come closest to each other, a better description of this type of anarchism is libertarian socialism—which includes not only anarchists who are socialists but also socialists who lean towards anarchism but are not quite anarchists,

The type of anarchism which appears when collectivism is worked out in more detail is communism. This is the view that it is not enough for the instruments of labour to be held in common, but that the products of labour should also be held in common and distributed on the principle of the slogan, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” The communist argument is that, while men are entitled to the full value of their labour, it is impossible to calculate the value of any one man’s labour, for the work of each is involved in the work of all, and different kinds of work have different kinds of value. It is therefore better for the entire economy to be in the hands of society as a whole and for the wage and price system to be abolished.

The leading figures of the anarchist movement at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century—such as Kropotkin, Malatesta, Reclus, Grave, Faure, Goldman, Berkman, Rocker, and so on—were communists. Going on from collectivism and reacting against Marxism, they postulated a more sophisticated form of revolutionary anarchism—the anarchism containing the most carefully considered criticism of present society and proposals for future society. This is an anarchism for those who accept the class struggle but have a wider view of the world. If col-

most important political goal. Thus libertarianism is not so much a specific type of anarchism as a milder form of it, the first stage on the way to complete anarchism. Sometimes it is actually used as a synonym or euphemism for anarchism in general, when there is some reason to avoid the more emotive word; but it is more generally used to mean the acceptance of anarchist ideas in a particular field without the acknowledgement of anarchism as a whole. Individualists are libertarian by definition, but libertarian socialists or libertarian communists are those who bring to socialism or communism a recognition of the essential value of the individual.

## Mutualism and federalism

The type of anarchism which appears when individualists begin to put their ideas into practice is mutualism. This is the view that, instead of relying on the state, society should be organised by individuals entering into voluntary agreements with each other on a basis of equality and reciprocity. Mutualism is a feature of any association which is more than instinctive and less than official, and it is not necessarily anarchist; but it was historically important in the development of anarchism, and nearly all anarchist proposals for the reorganisation of society have been essentially mutualist.

The first person who deliberately called himself an anarchist—Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, in *What is Property?* (1840)—was a mutualist. In reaction against the utopian and revolutionary socialists of the early nineteenth century, he postulated a society which is made up of cooperative groups of free individuals exchanging the necessities of life on the basis of labour value, and exchanging free credit through a people’s bank. This is an anarchism for craftsmen and artisans, for smallholders and shopkeepers, for professional men and specialists, for people who like to stand on their own feet. Despite his denials, Proudhon had many followers, especially among the skilled working class and the lower middle class, and his influence

was considerable in France during the second half of the nineteenth century; mutualism also had a particular appeal in North America, and to a lesser extent in Britain. It later tended to be taken up by the sort of cranks who favour currency reform or self-sufficient communities—measures of a kind which promise quick results but do not affect the basic structure of society. This is a view of man which makes sense as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough to deal with such things as industry and capital, the class system which dominates them, or—above all—the state.

Mutualism is of course the principle of the co-operative movement, but co-operative societies are run on democratic rather than anarchist lines. A society organised according to the principle of anarchist mutualism would be one in which communal activities were in effect in the hands of co-operative societies without permanent managers or elected officials. Economic mutualism may thus be seen as co-operativism minus bureaucracy, or as capitalism minus profit.

Mutualism expressed geographically rather than economically becomes federalism. This is the view that society in a wider sense than the local community should be co-ordinated by a network of councils which are drawn from the various areas and which are themselves co-ordinated by councils covering wider areas. The essential feature of anarchist federalism is that the members of such councils would be delegates without any executive authority, subject to instant recall, and that the councils would have no central authority, only a simple secretariat. Proudhon, who first elaborated mutualism, also first elaborated federalism—in *The Federal Principle* (1863)—and his followers were called federalists as well as mutualists, especially those who were active in the labour movement; thus the figures in the early history of the First International and in the Paris Commune who anticipated the ideas of the modern anarchist movement mostly described themselves as federalists.

Federalism is not so much a type of anarchism as an inevitable part of anarchism. Virtually all anarchists are federalists, but virtu-

ally none would define themselves only as federalists. Federalism is after all a common principle which is by no means confined to the anarchist movement. There is nothing utopian about it. The international systems for co-ordinating railways, shipping, air traffic, postal services, telegraphs and telephones, scientific research, famine relief, disaster operations, and many other world-wide activities are essentially federalist in structure. Anarchists simply add that such systems would work just as well within as they do between countries. After all, this is already true of the overwhelming proportion of voluntary societies, associations and organisations of all kinds which handle those social activities which are not financially profitable or politically sensitive.

## Collectivism, communism, syndicalism

The type of anarchism which goes further than individualism or mutualism and involves a direct threat to the class system and the state is what used to be called collectivism. This is the view that society can be reconstructed only when the working class seizes control of the economy by a social revolution, destroys the state apparatus, and reorganises production on the basis of common ownership and control by associations of working people. The instruments of labour would be held in common, but the products of labour would be distributed on the principle of the slogan, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work."

The first modern anarchists—the Bakuninists in the First International—were collectivists. In reaction against the reformist mutualists and federalists and also against the authoritarian Blanquists and Marxists, they postulated a simple form of revolutionary anarchism—the anarchism of the class struggle and the proletariat, of the mass insurrection of the poor against the rich, and the immediate transition to a free and classless society without any intermediate period of dictatorship. This is an anarchism for