

Anarchism: The Feminist Connection

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Eleven years ago, when I was in a small-town Illinois high school, I had never heard of the word “anarchism” — at all. The closest I came to it was knowing that anarchy meant “chaos”. As for socialism and communism, my history classes somehow conveyed the message that there was no difference between them and fascism, a word that brought to mind Hitler, concentration camps, and all kinds of horrible things which never happened in a free country like ours. I was subtly being taught to swallow the bland pablum of traditional American politics: moderation, compromise, fence-straddling, Chuck Percy as wonder boy. I learned the lesson well: it took me *years* to recognize the bias and distortion which had shaped my entire “education”. The “his-story” of *mankind* (white) had meant just that; as a woman I was relegated to a vicarious existence. As an anarchist I had no existence at all. A whole chunk of the past (and thus possibilities for the future) had been kept from me. Only recently did I discover that many of my disconnected political impulses and inclinations shared a common framework — that is, the anarchist or libertarian tradition of thought. I was like suddenly seeing red after years of colourblind grays.

Emma Goldman furnished me with my first definition of anarchism:

Anarchism, then really stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government. Anarchism stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth, an order that will guarantee to every human being free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations.¹

Soon, I started making mental connections between anarchism and radical feminism. It became very important to me to write down some of the perceptions in this area as a way of communicating to others the excitement I felt about anarcho-feminism. It seems crucial that we share our visions with one another in order to break down some of the barriers that misunderstanding and splinterism raise between us. Although I call myself an anarcho-feminist, this definition can easily include socialism, communism, cultural feminism, lesbian separatism, or any of a dozen other political labels. As Su Negrin writes: “No political umbrella can cover all my needs.”² We may have more in common than we think we do. While I am writing here about my own reactions and perceptions, I don’t see either my life or thoughts as separate from those of other women. In fact, one of my strongest convictions regarding the Women’s Movement is that we *do* share an incredible commonality of vision. My own participation in this vision is not to offer definitive statements or rigid answers but rather possibilities and changeable connections which I hope will bounce around among us and contribute to a continual process of individual and collective growth and evolution/revolution.

What Does Anarchism Really Mean?

Anarchism has been maligned and misinterpreted for so long that maybe the most important thing to begin with is an explanation of what it is and isn’t. Probably the most prevalent stereotype of the anarchist is a malevolent-looking man hiding a lighted bomb beneath a black cape,

¹ Emma Goldman, “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For”, *Red Emma Speaks* (Vintage Books, 1972), p.59.

² Su Negrin, *Begin at Start* (Times Change Press, 1972), p. 128.

ready to destroy or assassinate everything and everybody in his path. This image engenders fear and revulsion in most people, regardless of their politics; consequently, anarchism is dismissed as ugly, violent, and extreme. Another misconception is the anarchist as impractical idealist, dealing in useless, Utopian abstractions and out of touch with concrete reality. The result: anarchism is once again dismissed, this time as an “impossible dream”.

Neither of these images is accurate (though there have been both anarchist assassins *and* idealists — as is the case in many political movements, left and right). What is accurate depends, of course, on one’s frame of reference. There are different kinds of anarchist, just as there are different kinds of socialists. What I will talk about here is communist anarchism, which I see as virtually identical to libertarian (i.e. nonauthoritarian) socialism. Labels can be terribly confusing, so in hopes of clarifying the term, I’ll define anarchism using three major principles (each of which I believe is related to a radical feminist analysis of society — more on that later):

1. *Belief in the abolition of authority, hierarchy, government.* Anarchists call for the dissolution (rather than the seizure) of *power* — of human over human, of state over community. Whereas many socialists call for a working class government and an eventual “withering away of the state”, anarchists believe that the means create the ends, that a strong State becomes self-perpetuating. The only way to achieve anarchism (according to anarchist theory) is through the creation of co-operative, anti-authoritarian forms. To separate the process from the goals of revolution is to insure the perpetuation of oppressive structure and style.
2. *Belief in both individuality and collectivity.* Individuality is not incompatible with communist thought. A distinction must be made though, between “rugged individualism”, which fosters competition and a disregard for the needs of others, and true individuality, which implies freedom without infringement on others’ freedom. Specifically, in terms of social and political organization, this meant balancing individual initiative with collective action through the creation of structures which enable decision-making to rest in the hands of all those in a group, community, or factory, not in the hands of “representatives” or “leaders”. It means coordination and action via a non-hierarchical network (overlapping circles rather than a pyramid) of small groups or communities. (See descriptions of Spanish anarchist collectives in next section.) Finally, it means that successful revolution involves unmanipulated, autonomous individuals and groups working together to take “direct, unmediated control of society and of their own lives”.³
3. *Belief in both spontaneity and organization.* Anarchists have long been accused of advocating chaos. Most people in fact believe that anarchism is a synonym for disorder, confusion, violence. This is a total misrepresentation of what anarchism stands for. Anarchists don’t deny the necessity of organization; they only claim that it must come from below, not above, from within rather than from without. Externally imposed structure or rigid rules which foster manipulation and passivity are the most dangerous forms a socialist “revolution” can take. No one can dictate the exact shape of the future. Spontaneous action within the context of a specific situation is necessary if we are going to create a society which responds to the changing needs of individuals and groups. Anarchists believe in fluid forms:

³ Murray Bookchin, “On Spontaneity and Organization”, *Liberation*, March, 1972, p.6.

small-scale participatory democracy in conjunction with large-scale collective cooperation and coordination (without loss of individual initiative).

So anarchism sounds great, but how could it possibly work? That kind of Utopian romanticism couldn't have any relation to the real world... right? Wrong. Anarchists have actually been successful (if only temporarily) in a number of instances (none of which is very well known). Spain and France, in particular, have long histories of anarchist activity, and it was in these two countries that I found the most exciting concretisations of theoretical anarchism.

Beyond Theory — Spain 1936–39, France 1968

The revolution is a thing of the people, a popular creation; the counter-revolution is a thing of the State. It has always been so, and must always be so, whether in Russia, Spain, or China.⁴

— Anarchist Federation of Iberia (FAI), *Tierra y Libertad*, July 3, 1936

The so-called Spanish Civil War is popularly believed to have been a simple battle between Franco's fascist forces and those committed to liberal democracy. What has been overlooked, or ignored, is that much more was happening in Spain than civil war. A broadly-based social revolution adhering to anarchist principles was taking firm, concrete form in many areas of the country. The gradual curtailment and eventual destruction of this libertarian movement is less important to discuss here than what was actually achieved by the women and men who were part of it. Against tremendous odds, they made anarchism work.

The realization of anarchist collectivisation and workers' self-management during the Spanish Revolution provides a classic example of organization-plus-spontaneity. In both rural and industrial Spain, anarchism had been a part of the popular consciousness for many years. In the countryside, the people had a long tradition of communalism; many villages still shared common property or gave plots of land to those without any. Decades of rural collectivism and cooperation laid the foundation for theoretical anarchism, which came to Spain in the 1870s (via the Italian revolutionary, Fanelli, a friend of Bakunin) and eventually gave rise to anarco-syndicalism, the application of anarchist principles to industrial trade unionism. The *Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo*, founded in 1910, was the anarco-syndicalist union (working closely with the militant *Federacion Anarquista Iberica*) which provided instruction and preparation for workers' self-management and collectivization. Tens of thousands of books, newspapers, and pamphlets reaching almost every part of Spain contributed to an even greater general knowledge of anarchist thought⁵. The anarchist principles of non-hierarchical cooperation and individual initiative combined with anarco-syndicalist tactics of sabotage, boycott and general strike, and training in production and economics, gave the workers *background* in both theory and practice. This led to a successful *spontaneous* appropriation of both factories and land after July 1936.

When the Spanish right responded to the electoral victory of the Popular Front with an attempted military takeover, on July 19, 1936, the people fought back with a fury which checked

⁴ Paul Berman, *Quotations from the Anarchists* (Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 68.

⁵ Sam Doigoff, *The Anarchist Collectives* (Free Life Editions, 1974), p. 27.

the coup within 24 hours. At this point, ballot box success became incidental; total social revolution had begun. While the industrial workers either went on strike or actually began to run the factories themselves, the agricultural workers ignored landlords and started to cultivate the land on their own. Within a short time, over 60% of the land in Spain was worked collectively – without landlords, bosses, or competitive incentive. Industrial collectivization took place mainly in the province of Catalonia, where anarco-syndicalist influence was strongest. Since 75% of Spain's industry was located in Catalonia, this was no small achievement⁶. So, after 75 years of preparation and struggle, collectivization was achieved, through the spontaneous collective action of individuals dedicated to libertarian principles.

What, though, did collectivization actually mean, and how did it work? In general, the anarchist collectives functioned on two levels: (1) small-scale participatory democracy and (2) large-scale coordination with control at the bottom. At each level, the main concern was decentralization and individual initiative. In the factories and villages, representatives were chosen to councils which operated as administrative or coordinating bodies. Decisions always came from more general membership meetings, which all workers attended. To guard against the dangers of representation, representatives were workers themselves, and at all times subject to immediate, as well as periodic, replacement. These councils or committees were the basic units of self-management. From there, they could be expanded by further coordination into loose federations which would link together workers and operations over an entire industry or geographical area. In this way, distribution and sharing of goods could be performed, as well as implementation of programs of wide-spread concern, such as irrigation, transportation, and communication. Once again, the emphasis was on the bottom-to-top process. This very tricky balance between individuality and collectivism was most successfully accomplished by the Peasant Federation of Levant, which included 900 collectives, and the Aragon Federation of Collectives, composed of about 500 collectives.

Probably the most important aspect of self-management was the equalization of wages. This took many forms, but frequently the “family wage” system was used, wages being paid to each worker in money or coupons according to her/his needs and those of dependants. Goods in abundance were distributed freely, while others were obtainable with “money”.

The benefits which came from wage equalization were tremendous. After huge profits in the hands of a few men were eliminated, the excess money was used both to modernize industry (purchase of new equipment, better working conditions) and to improve the land (irrigation, dams, purchase of tractors, etc.). Not only were better products turned out more efficiently, but consumer prices were lowered as well. This was true in such varied industries as: textiles, metal and munitions, gas, water, electricity, baking, fishing, municipal transportation, railroads, telephone services, optical products, health services, etc. The workers themselves benefited from a shortened work week, better working conditions, free health care, unemployment pay, and a new pride in their work. Creativity was fostered by self-management and the spirit of mutual aid; workers were concerned with turning out products which were better than those turned out under conditions of labour exploitation. They wanted to demonstrate that socialism works, that competition and greed motives are unnecessary. Within months, the standard of living had been raised by anywhere from 50–100% in many areas of Spain.

⁶ Ibid, pp.6, 7, 85.

The achievements of the Spanish anarchists go beyond a higher standard of living and economic equality; they involve the realization of basic human ideals: freedom, individual creativity, and collective cooperation. The Spanish anarchist collectives did not fail; they were destroyed from without. Those (of the right and left) who believed in a strong State worked to wipe them out — of Spain and history. The successful anarchism of roughly eight million Spanish people is only now beginning to be uncovered.

C'est pour toi que tu fais la revolution.⁷

(“It is for yourself that you make the revolution.”)

— Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit

Anarchism has played an important part in French history, but rather than delve into the past, I want to focus on a contemporary event — May-June, 1968. The May-June events have particular significance because they proved that a general strike and takeover of the factories by the workers, and the universities by the students, could happen in a modern, capitalistic, consumption-oriented country. In addition, the issues raised by the students and workers in France (e.g. self-determination, the quality of life) cut across class lines and have tremendous implications for the possibility of revolutionary change in a post-scarcity society.⁸

On March 22, 1968, students at the University of Nanterre, among them anarchist Daniel Cohn-Bendit, occupied administrative buildings at their school, calling for an end to both the Vietnam war and their own oppression as students. (Their demands were similar in content to those of students from Columbia to Berlin protesting *in loco parentis*.) The University was closed down, and the demonstrations spread to the Sorbonne. The SNESUP (the union of secondary school and university teachers) called for a strike, and the students' union, the UNEF, organized a demonstration for May 6. That day, students and police clashed in the Latin Quarter in Paris; the demonstrators built barricades in the streets, and many were brutally beaten by the riot police. By the 7th, the number of protesters had grown to between twenty and fifty thousand people, marching toward the Etoile singing the Internationale. During the next few days, skirmishes between demonstrators and police in the Latin Quarter became increasingly violent, and the public was generally outraged at the police repression. Talks between labour unions and teachers' and students' unions began, and the UNEF and the FEN (a teachers' union) called for an unlimited strike and demonstration. On May 13, around six hundred thousand people — students, teachers, and workers — marched through Paris in protest.

On the same day, the workers at the Sud-Aviation plant in Nantes (a city with the strongest anarco-syndicalist tendencies in France⁹) went out on strike. It was this action that touched off the general strike, the largest in history, including ten million workers — “professionals and labourers, intellectuals and football players.”¹⁰ Banks, post offices, gas stations, and department stores closed; the subway and busses stopped running; and trash piled up as the garbage collectors joined the strike. The Sorbonne was occupied by students, teachers, and anyone who wanted to come and participate in discussions there. Political dialogues which questioned the vary basis

⁷ Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism — The Left Wing Alternative* (McGraw-Hill, 1968), p.256.

⁸ See Murrey Bookchin's *Post Scarcity Anarchism* (Ramparts Press, 1974) for both an insightful analysis of the May-June events and a discussion of revolutionary potential in a technological society.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.262.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.250.

of French capitalist society went on for days. All over Paris posters and graffiti appeared: *It is forbidden to forbid. Life without dead times. All power to the Imagination. The more you consume, the less you live.* May-June became both an “assault on the established order” and a “festival of the streets”.¹¹ Old lines between the middle and working classes often became meaningless as the younger workers and the students found themselves making similar demands: liberation from an oppressive authoritarian system (university or factory) and the right to make decisions about their own lives.

The people of France stood at the brink of total revolution. A general strike had paralysed the country. The students occupied the universities and the workers, the factories. What remained to be done was for the workers actually to *work* the factories, to take direct unmediated action and settle for nothing less than total self-management. Unfortunately, this did not occur. Authoritarian politics and bureaucratic methods die hard, and most of the major French workers’ unions were saddled with both. As in Spain, the Communist Party worked against the direct, spontaneous actions of the people in the streets: the Revolution must be dictated from above. Leaders of the CGT (the Communist workers’ union) tried to prevent contacts between the students and workers, and a united left soon became an impossibility. As de Gaulle and the police mobilized their forces and even greater violence broke out, many strikers accepted limited demands (better pay, shorter hours, etc.) and returned to work. Students continued their increasingly bloody confrontations with police, but the moment had passed. By the end of June, France had returned to “normality” under the same old Gaullist regime.

What happened in France in 1968 is vitally connected to the Spanish Revolution of 1936; in both cases anarchist principles were not only discussed but implemented. The fact that the French workers never did achieve working self-management may be because anarcho-syndicalism was not as prevalent in France in the years prior to 1968 as it was in Spain before 1936. Of course, this is an over-simplification; explanation for a “failed” revolution can run on into infinity. What is crucial here, once again, is the fact that it happened at all. May-June, 1968, disproves the common belief that revolution is impossible in an advanced capitalist country. The children of the French middle and working classes, bred to passivity, mindless consumerism, and/or alienated labor, were rejecting much more than capitalism. They were questioning authority itself, demanding the right to a free and *meaningful* existence. The reasons for revolution in modern industrial society are thus no longer limited to hunger and material scarcity; they include the desire for human liberation from all forms of domination, in essence a radical change in the very “quality of everyday life”.¹² They assume the necessity of a libertarian society. Anarchism can no longer be considered an anachronism.

It is often said that anarchists live in a world of dreams to come and do not see things which happen today. We see them only too well, and in their true colors, and that is what makes us carry the hatchet into the forest of prejudices that besets us.¹³

— Peter Kropotkin

There are two main reasons why revolution was aborted in France: (1) inadequate preparation in the theory and practice of anarchism and (2) the vast power of the State coupled with authori-

¹¹ Bookchin, *On Spontaneity and Organization*, pp. 11–12.

¹² Bookchin, *Post Scarcity Anarchism*, p.249.

¹³ Berman, p.146.

tarianism and bureaucracy in potentially sympathetic left-wing groups. In Spain, the revolution was more widespread and tenacious because of the extensive preparation. Yet it was still eventually crushed by a fascist State and authoritarian leftists. It is important to consider these two factors in relation to the situation in the United States today. We are not only facing a powerful State whose armed forces, police, and nuclear weapons could instantly destroy the entire human race, but we also find ourselves confronting a pervasive reverence for authority and hierarchical forms whose continuance is ensured daily through the kind of home-grown passivity bred by family, school, church, and TV screen. In addition, the U.S. is a huge country, with only a small, sporadic history of anarchist activity. It would seem that not only are we unprepared, we are literally dwarfed by a State more powerful than those of France and Spain combined. To say we are up against tremendous odds is an understatement.

But where does defining the Enemy as a ruthless, unconquerable giant lead us? If we don't allow ourselves to be paralysed by fatalism and futility, it could force us to redefine revolution in a way that would focus on anarcho-feminism as the framework in which to view the struggle for human liberation. It is women who now hold the key to new conceptions of revolution, women who realize that revolution can no longer mean the seizure of power or the domination of one group by another – under *any* circumstances, for *any* length of time. It is domination itself that must be abolished. The very survival of the planet depends on it. Men can no longer be allowed to wantonly manipulate the environment for their own self-interest, just as they can no longer be allowed to systematically destroy whole races of human beings. The presence of hierarchy and authoritarian mind-set threaten out human and planetary existence. Global liberation and libertarian politics have become *necessary*, not just utopian pipe dreams. We must “acquire the conditions of life in order to survive”.¹⁴

To focus on anarcho-feminism as the necessary revolutionary framework for our struggle is not to deny the immensity of the task before us. We do see “only too well” the root causes of our oppression and the tremendous power of the Enemy. But we also see that the way out of the deadly historical cycle of incomplete or aborted revolutions requires of us new definitions and new tactics – ones which point to the kind of “hollowing out”¹⁵ process described later in the “Making Utopia Real” section. As women, we are particularly well-suited for participation in this process. Underground for ages, we have learned to be covert, subtle, sly, silent, tenacious, acutely sensitive, and expert at communication skills.

For our own survival, we learned to weave webs of rebellion which were invisible to the “masterful” eye.

We know what a boot looks like
when seen from underneath,
we know the philosophy of boots...

Soon we will invade like weeds,
everywhere but slowly;
the captive plants will rebel

¹⁴ Bookchin, *Post Scarcity Anarchism*, p.40.

¹⁵ Bookchin, *On Spontaneity and Organization*, p.10.

with us, fences will topple,
brick walls ripple and fall,

there will be no more boots.
Meanwhile we eat dirt
and sleep; we are waiting
under your feet.

When we say Attack
you will hear nothing
at first.¹⁶

Anarchistic preparation is not non-existent in this country. It exists in the minds and actions of women readying themselves (often unknowingly) for a revolution whose forms will shatter historical inevitability and the very process of history itself.

Anarchism and the Women's Movement

The development of sisterhood is a unique threat, for it is directed against the basic social and psychic model of hierarchy and domination...¹⁷

— Mary Daly

All across the country, independent groups of women began functioning without the structure, leaders, and other factotums of the male left, creating independently and simultaneously, organizations similar to those of anarchists of many decades and locales. No accident, either.¹⁸

— Cathy Levine

I have not touched upon the matter of woman's role in Spain and France, as it can be summed up in one word — unchanged. Anarchist men have been little better than males everywhere in their subjection of women.¹⁹ Thus the absolute necessity of a feminist anarchist revolution. Otherwise the very principles on which anarchism is based become utter hypocrisy.

The current women's movement and a radical feminist analysis of society have contributed much to libertarian thought. In fact, it is my contention that feminists have been unconscious anarchists in both theory and practice for years. We now need to become *consciously* aware of the connections between anarchism and feminism and use that framework for our thoughts and actions. We have to be able to see very clearly where we want to go and how to get there. In

¹⁶ Margaret Atwood, "Song of the Worms", *You Are Happy* (Harper & Row, 1974), p.35.

¹⁷ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Beacon Press, 1973), p. 133.

¹⁸ Cathy Levine, "The Tyranny of Tyranny", *Black Rose* 1, p.56.

¹⁹ Temma Kaplan of the UCLA history department has done considerable research on women's anarchist groups (esp. "Mujeres Liberes") in the Spanish Revolution. See also Liz Willis, *Women in the Spanish Revolution*, Solidarity Pamphlet No. 48.

order to be more effective, in order to create the future we sense is possible, we must realise that what we want is not change but total *transformation*.

The radical feminist perspective is almost pure anarchism. The basic theory postulates the nuclear family as the basis for all authoritarian systems. The lesson the child learns, from father to teacher to boss to God, is to OBEY the great anonymous voice of Authority. To graduate from childhood to adulthood is to become a full-fledged automaton, incapable of questioning or even thinking clearly. We pass into middle-America, believing everything we are told and numbly accepting the destruction of life all around us.

What feminists are dealing with is a mind-fucking process — the male domineering attitude toward the external world, allowing only subject/object relationships. Traditional male politics reduces humans to object status and then dominates and manipulates them for abstract “goals”. Women, on the other hand, are trying to develop a consciousness of “Other” in all areas. We see subject-to-subject relationships as not only desirable but necessary. (Many of us have chosen to work with and love only women for just this reason — those kinds of relationships are so much more possible.) Together we are working to expand our empathy and understanding of other living things and to identify with those entities outside of ourselves, rather than objectifying and manipulating them. At this point, a respect for all life is a prerequisite for our very survival.

Radical feminist theory also criticizes male hierarchical thought patterns — in which rationality dominates sensuality, mind dominates intuition, and persistent splits and polarities (active/passive, child/adult, sane/insane, work/play, spontaneity/organization) alienate us from the mind-body experience as a *Whole* and from the *Continuum* of human experience. Women are attempting to get rid of these splits, to live in harmony with the universe as whole, integrated humans dedicated to the collective healing of our individual wounds and schisms.

In actual practice within the Women’s Movement, feminists have had both success and failure in abolishing hierarchy and domination. I believe that women frequently speak and act as “intuitive” anarchists, that is, we *approach*, or *verge on*, a complete denial of all patriarchal thought and organization. That approach, however, is blocked by the powerful and insidious forms which patriarchy takes — in our minds and in our relationships with one another. Living within and being conditioned by an authoritarian society often prevents us from making that all-important connection between feminism and anarchism. When we say we are fighting the patriarchy, it isn’t always clear to all of us that that means fighting *all* hierarchy, *all* leadership, *all* government, and the very idea of authority itself. Our impulses toward collective work and small leaderless groups have been anarchistic, but in most cases we haven’t *called* them by that name. And that is important, because an understanding of feminism as anarchism could springboard women out of reformism and stop-gap measures into a revolutionary confrontation with the basic nature of authoritarian politics.

If we want to “bring down the patriarchy”, we need to talk about anarchism, to know exactly what it means, and to use that framework to transform ourselves and the structure of our daily lives. Feminism doesn’t mean female corporate power or a woman President; it means *no* corporate power and *no* Presidents. The Equal Rights Amendment will not transform society; it only gives women the “right” to plug into a hierarchical economy. Challenging sexism means challenging *all* hierarchy — economic, political, and personal. And that means an anarca-feminist revolution.

Specifically, when have feminists been anarchistic, and when have we stopped short? As the second wave of feminism spread across the country in the late 60s, the forms which women’s

groups took frequently reflected an unspoken libertarian consciousness. In rebellion against the competitive power games, impersonal hierarchy, and mass organization tactics of male politics, women broke off into small, leaderless, consciousness-raising groups, which dealt with personal issues in our daily lives. Face-to-face, we attempted to get at the root cause of our oppression by sharing our hitherto unvalued perceptions and experiences. We learned from each other that politics is not “out there” but in our minds and bodies and between individuals. Personal relationships could and did oppress us as a political class. Our misery and self-hatred were a direct result of male domination — in home, street, job, and political organization.

So, in many unconnected areas of the U.S., C-R groups developed as a spontaneous, direct (re)action to patriarchal forms. The emphasis on the small group as a basic organizational unit, on the personal and political, on anti-authoritarianism, and on spontaneous direct action was essentially anarchistic. But, where were the years and years of preparation which sparked the Spanish revolutionary activities? The structure of women’s groups bore a striking resemblance to that of anarchist affinity groups within anarco-syndicalist unions in Spain, France, and many other countries. Yet, we had not called ourselves anarchists and consciously organized around anarchist principles. At the time, we did not even have an underground network of communication and idea-and-skill sharing. Before the women’s movement was more than a handful of isolated groups groping in the dark toward answers, anarchism as an unspecified ideal existed in our minds.

I believe that this puts women in the unique position of being the bearers of a subsurface anarchist consciousness which, if articulated and concretized can take us further than any previous group toward the achievement of total revolution. Women’s intuitive anarchism, if sharpened and clarified, is an incredible leap forward (or beyond) in the struggle for human liberation. Radical feminist theory hails feminism as the Ultimate Revolution. This is true if, and only if, we recognize and claim our anarchist roots. At the point where we fail to see the feminist connection to anarchism, we stop short of revolution and become trapped in “ye olde male political rut”. It is time to stop groping in the darkness and see what we have done and are doing in the context of where we want to ultimately be.

C-R groups were a good beginning, but they often got so bogged down in talking about personal problems that they failed to make the jump to direct action and political confrontation. Groups that did organize around a specific issue or project sometimes found that the “tyranny of structurelessness” could be as destructive as the “tyranny of tyranny”²⁰ The failure to blend organization with spontaneity frequently caused the emergence of those with more skills or personal charisma as leaders. The resentment and frustration felt by those who found themselves following sparked in-fighting, guilt-tripping, and power struggles. Too often this ended in either total ineffectiveness or a backlash adherence to “what we need is more structure” (in the old male up/down sense of the word).

Once again, I think that what was missing was a verbalized anarchist analysis. Organization does not have to stifle spontaneity or follow hierarchical patterns. The women’s groups or projects which have been the most successful are those which experimented with various fluid structures: the rotation of tasks and chair- persons, sharing of all skills, equal access to information and resources, non-monopolized decision-making, and time slots for discussion of group

²⁰ See Joreen’s “The Tyranny of Structurelessness”, *Second Wave*, Vol. 2, No. 1, and Cathy Levine’s “The Tyranny of Tyranny”, *Black Rose* 1.

dynamics. This latter structural element is important because it involves a continued effort on the part of group members to watch for “creeping power politics”. If women are verbally committing themselves to collective work, this requires a real struggle to unlearn passivity (to eliminate “followers”) and to share special skills or knowledge (to avoid “leaders”). This doesn’t mean that we cannot be inspired by one another’s words and lives; strong actions by strong individuals can be contagious and thus important. But we must be careful not to slip into old behavior patterns.

On the positive side, the emerging structure of the women’s movement in the last few years has generally followed an anarchistic pattern of small project-oriented groups continually weaving an underground network of communication and collective action around specific issues. Partial success at leader/“star” avoidance and the diffusion of small action projects (Rape Crisis Centers, Women’s Health Collectives) across the country have made it extremely difficult for the women’s movement to be pinned down to one person or group. Feminism is a many-headed monster which cannot be destroyed by singular decapitation. We spread and grow in ways that are incomprehensible to a hierarchical mentality.

This is not, however, to underestimate the immense power of the Enemy. The most treacherous form this power can take is cooptation, which feeds on any short-sighted unanarchistic view of feminism as mere “social change”. To think of sexism as an evil which can be eradicated by female participation in the way things are is to insure the continuation of domination and oppression. “Feminist” capitalism is a contradiction in terms. When we establish women’s credit unions, restaurants, bookstores, etc., we must be clear that we are doing so for our own survival, for the purpose of creating a counter-system whose processes contradict and challenge competition, profit-making, and all forms of economic oppression. We must be committed to “living on the boundaries”²¹, to anti-capitalist, non-consumption values. What we want is neither integration nor a coup d’etat which would “transfer power from one set of boys to another set of boys”.²² What we ask is nothing less than total revolution, revolution whose forms invent a future untainted by inequity, domination, or disrespect for individual variation — in short, feminist-anarchist revolution. I believe that women have known all along how to move in the direction of human liberation; we only need to shake off lingering male political forms and dictums and focus on our own anarchistic female analysis.

Where Do We Go From Here? Making Utopia Real

“Ah, your vision is romantic bullshit, soppy religiosity, flimsy idealism.” “You’re into poetry because you can’t deliver concrete details.” So says the little voice in the back of my (your?) head. But the front of my head knows that if you were here next to me, we could talk. And that in our talk would come (concrete, detailed) descriptions of how such and such might happen, how this or that would be resolved. What my vision really lacks is concrete, detailed human bodies. Then it wouldn’t be a flimsy vision, it would be a fleshy reality.²³

— Su Negrin

²¹ Daly, p.55.

²² Robin Morgan, speech at Boston College, Boston, Mass., Nov., 1973.

²³ Negrin, p.171.

Instead of getting discouraged and isolated now, we should be in our small groups – discussing, planning, creating, and making trouble... we should always be actively engaging in and creating feminist activity, because we all thrive on it; in the absence of [it], women take tranquilizers, go insane, and commit suicide.²⁴

– Cathy Levin

Those of us who lived through the excitement of sit-ins, marches, student strikes, demonstrations, and REVOLUTION NOW in the 60s may find ourselves disillusioned and downright cynical about anything happening in the 70s. Giving up or in (“open” marriage? hip capitalism? the Guru Maharaji?) seems easier than facing the prospect of decades of struggle and maybe even ultimate failure. At this point, we lack an overall framework to see the process of revolution in. Without it, we are doomed to deadended, isolated struggle or the individual solution. The kind of framework, or coming-together-point, that anarca-feminism provides would appear to be a prerequisite for any sustained effort to reach Utopian goals. By looking at Spain and France, we can see that true revolution is “neither an accidental happening nor a coup d’etat artificially engineered from above.”²⁵ It takes years of preparation: sharing of ideas and information, changes in consciousness and behavior, and the creation of political and economic alternatives to capitalist, hierarchical structures. It takes spontaneous direct action on the part of autonomous individuals through collective political confrontation. It is important to “free your mind” and your personal life, but it is not sufficient. Liberation is not an insular experience; it occurs in conjunction with other human beings. There are no individual “liberated women”.

So, what I’m talking about is a *long-term process*, a series of actions in which we unlearn passivity and learn to take control over our own lives. I am talking about a “hollowing out” of the present system through the formation of mental and physical (concrete) alternatives to the way things are. The romantic image of a small band of armed guerrillas overthrowing the U.S. government is obsolete (as is all male politics) and basically irrelevant to this conception of revolution. We would be squashed if we tried it. Besides, as the poster says, “What we want is not the overthrow of the government, but a situation in which it gets lost in the shuffle.” This is what happened (temporarily) in Spain, and almost happened in France. Whether armed resistance will be necessary at some point is open to debate. The anarchist principle of “means create ends” seems to imply pacifism, but the power of the State is so great that it is difficult to be absolute about non-violence. (Armed resistance was crucial in the Spanish Revolution, and seemed important in France 1968 as well.) The question of pacifism, however, would entail another discussion, and what I’m concerned with here is emphasizing the preparation needed to transform society, a preparation which includes an anarca-feminist framework, long-range revolutionary patience, and continual active confrontation with entrenched patriarchal attitudes.

The actual tactics of preparation are things that we have been involved with for a long time. We need to continue and develop them further. I see them as functioning on three levels: (1) “educational” (sharing of ideas, experiences), (2) economic/political, and (3) personal/political.

“Education” has a rather condescending ring to it, but I don’t mean “bringing the word to the masses” or guilt-tripping individuals into prescribed ways of being. I’m talking about the many methods we have developed for sharing our lives with one another – from writing (our network

²⁴ Levine, p.50.

²⁵ Doigoff, p. 19.

of feminist publications), study groups, and women's radio and TV shows to demonstrations, marches, and street theatre. The mass media would seem to be a particularly important area for revolutionary communication and influence — just think of how our own lives were *mis*-shaped by radio and TV²⁶. Seen in isolation, these things might seem ineffectual, but people *do* change from writing, reading, talking, and listening to each other, as well as from active participation in political movements. Going out into the streets together shatters passivity and creates a spirit of communal effort and life energy which can help sustain and transform us. My own transformation from all-american-girl to anarcho-feminist was brought about by a decade of reading, discussion, and involvement with many kinds of people and politics — from the Midwest to the West and East Coasts. My experiences may in some ways be unique, but they are not, I think, extraordinary. In many, many places in this country, people are slowly beginning to question the way they were conditioned to acceptance and passivity. God and Government are not the ultimate authorities they once were. This is not to minimize the extent of the power of Church and State, but rather to emphasize that seemingly inconsequential changes in thought and behavior, when solidified in collective action, constitute a real challenge to the patriarchy.

Economic/political tactics fall into the realm of direct action and “purposeful illegality” (Daniel Guerin's term). Anarcho-syndicalism specifies three major modes of direct action: sabotage, strike, and boycott. Sabotage means “obstructing by every possible method, the regular process of production”²⁷. More and more frequently, sabotage is practised by people unconsciously influenced by changing societal values. For example, systematic absenteeism is carried out by both blue and white collar workers. Defying employers can be done as subtly as the “slow-down” or as blatantly as the “fuck-up”. Doing as little work as possible as slowly as possible is common employee practice, as is messing up the actual work process (often as a union tactic during a strike). Witness habitual misfiling or loss of “important papers” by secretaries, or the continual switching of destination placards on trains during the 1967 railroad strike in Italy.

Sabotage tactics can be used to make strikes much more effective. The strike itself is the workers' most important weapon. Any individual strike has the potential of paralysing the system if it spreads to other industries and becomes a general strike. Total social revolution is then only a step away. Of course, the general strike must have as its ultimate goal worker's self-management (as well as a clear sense of how to achieve and hold on to it), or else the revolution will be still-born (as in France, 1968).

The boycott can also be a powerful strike or union strategy (e.g., the boycott of non-union grapes, lettuce, and wines, and of Farah pants). In addition, it can be used to force economic and social changes. Refusal to vote, to pay war taxes, or to participate in capitalist competition and over-consumption are all important actions when coupled with support of alternative, non-profit structures (food co-ops, health and law collectives, recycled clothing and book stores, free schools, etc.). Consumerism is one of the main strongholds of capitalism. To boycott buying itself (especially products geared to obsolescence and those offensively advertised) is a tactic that has the power to change the “quality of everyday life”. Refusal to vote is often practised out of despair or passivity rather than as a conscious political statement against a pseudo-democracy where power and money elect a political elite. Non-voting can mean something other than silent

²⁶ The Cohn-Bendits state that one major mistake in Paris 1968 was the failure to take complete control of the media, especially the radio and TV.

²⁷ Goldman, “Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice”, *Red Emma Speaks*, p.71.

consent if we are simultaneously participating in the creation of genuine democratic forms in an alternative network of anarchist affinity groups.

This takes us to the third area — personal/political, which is of course vitally connected to the other two. The anarchist affinity group has long been a revolutionary organizational structure. In anarco-syndicalist unions, they functioned as training grounds for workers' self-management. They can be temporary groupings of individuals for a specific short-term goal, more "permanent" work collectives (as an alternative to professionalism and career elitism), or living collectives where individuals learn how to rid themselves of domination or possessiveness in their one-to-one relationships. Potentially, anarchist affinity groups are the base on which we can build a new libertarian, non-hierarchical society. The way we live and work changes the way we think and perceive (and vice versa), and when changes in consciousness become changes in action and behavior, the revolution has begun.

Making Utopia real involves many levels of struggle. In addition to specific tactics which can be constantly developed and changed, we need political tenacity: the strength and ability to see beyond the present to a joyous, revolutionary future. To get from here to there requires more than a leap of faith. It demands of each of us a day-to-day, long-range commitment to possibility and direct action.

The Transformation of the Future

The creation of female culture is as pervasive a process as we can imagine, for it is participation in a VISION which is continually unfolding anew in everything from our talks with friends, to meat boycotts, to taking over storefronts for child care centres, to making love with a sister. It is revelatory, undefinable, except as a process of change. Women's culture is all of us exorcising, naming, creating toward the vision of harmony with ourselves, each other, and our sister earth. In the last ten years our having come faster and closer than ever before in the history of the patriarchy to overturning its power... is cause of exhilarant hope — wild, contagious, unconquerable, crazy HOPE!... The hope, the winning of life over death, despair and meaninglessness is everywhere I look now — like talismen of the faith in WOMANVISION...²⁸

— Laurel

I used to think that if the revolution didn't happen tomorrow, we would all be doomed to a catastrophic (or at least, catatonic) fate. I don't believe anymore that kind of before-and-after revolution, and I think we set ourselves up for failure and despair by thinking of it in those terms. I do believe that what we all need, what we absolutely require, in order to continue struggling (in spite of oppression of our daily lives) is HOPE, that is, a vision of the future so beautiful and so powerful that it pulls us steadily forward in a bottom-up creation of an inner and outer world both habitable and self-fulfilling for *all*²⁹. I believe that hope exists — that it is in Laurel's "wom-

²⁸ Laurel, "Towards a Woman Vision", *Amazon Quarterly*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, p.40.

²⁹ And, by self-fulfilling I mean not only in terms of survival needs (sufficient food, clothing, shelter. etc.) but psychological needs as well I (e.g., a non-oppressive environment which fosters total freedom of choice before specific, concretely possible alternatives).

anvision”, in Mary Daly’s “existential courage”³⁰ and in anarca-feminism. Our different voices describe the same dream, and “only the dream can shatter stone that blocks our mouths.”³¹ As we speak, we change, and as we change, we transform ourselves and the future simultaneously.

It is true that there is no solution, individual or otherwise, *in our society*.³² But if we can only balance this rather depressing knowledge with an awareness of the radical metamorphoses we have experienced — in our consciousness and in our lives — the perhaps we can have the courage to continue to create what we DREAM is possible. Obviously, it is not easy to face daily oppression and still continue to hope. But *it is our only chance*. If we abandon hope (the ability to see connections, to dream the present into the future), then we have already lost. Hope is woman’s most powerful revolutionary tool; it is what we give each other every time we share our lives, our work, and our love. It pulls us forward out of self-hatred, self-blame, and the fatalism which keeps us prisoners in separate cells. If we surrender to depression and despair now, we are accepting the inevitability of authoritarian politics and patriarchal domination (“Despair is the worst betrayal, the coldest seduction: to believe at last that the enemy will prevail.”³³ Marge Piercy). We must not let our pain and anger fade into hopelessness or short-sighted semi-“solutions”. Nothing we can do is enough, but on the other hand, those “small changes” we make in our minds, in our lives, in one another’s lives, are not totally futile and ineffectual. It takes a long time to make a revolution: it is something that one both prepares for and lives now. The transformation of the future will not be instantaneous, but it can be *total*... a continuum of thought and action, individuality and collectivity, spontaneity and organization, stretching from what is to what can be.

Anarchism provides a framework for this transformation. It is a vision, a dream, a possibility which becomes “real” as we live it. Feminism is the connection that links anarchism to the future. When we finally see that connection clearly, when we hold to that vision, when we refuse to be raped of that HOPE, we will be stepping over the edge of nothingness into a being now just barely imaginable. The womanvision that is anarca-feminism has been carried inside our women’s bodies for centuries. “It will be an ongoing struggle in each of us, to birth this vision”³⁴ but *we must do it*. We must “ride our anger like elephants into battle”.

We are sleepwalkers troubled by nightmare flashes,
In locked wards we closet our vision, renouncing ...
Only when we break the mirror and climb into our vision,
Only when we are the wind together streaming and singing,
Only in the dream we become with our bones for spears,
we are real at last
and wake.³⁵

³⁰ Daly, p.23.

³¹ Marge Piercy, “Provocation of the Dream”.

³² Fran Taylor, “A Depressing Discourse on Romance, the Individual Solution, and Related Misfortunes”, *Second Wave*, Vol. 3, No. 4.

³³ Marge Piercy, “Laying Down the Tower”, *To Be of Use* (Doubleday, 1973), p.88.

³⁴ Laurel, p.40.

³⁵ Piercy, “Provocation of the Dream”.

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