Anarcho
Now and After
What would Anarchy be like and how we create the new world by fighting the current one
April 24, 2020

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This is a write up of a talk I gave in Glasgow in 2018 entitled *Now and After: What would Anarchy be like and how we create the new world by fighting the current one*. It summarises anarchist ideas of what a free society would be like and how we get there. As with my previous write-ups, this reflects more what I intended to say rather than what was said. Hopefully it will be close enough. For more details of the ideas raised here, see Section I of *An Anarchist FAQ*.

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That is how we get from here to there – we only become capable of living in a free world by fighting to create it.

To Conclude

We can all agree that history shows the validity of Bakunin's comment that "[w]e are convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, and that Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality." State socialism has failed – the only viable version of socialism is libertarian or free socialism, anarchism. That capitalism has outlived the nightmare of Stalinism does not mean it is that much better nor does it mean we cannot do better – we can and we must.

Only anarchism recognises that, as Emma Goldman put it, that "[r]eal wealth consists of things of utility and beauty, in things that help create strong, beautiful bodies and surroundings inspiring to live in." Such a society will not fall from the skies – we need to fight for it. In so doing, we change both the world and ourselves – indeed, as Juan García Oliver noted, "[w]ho hasn't been changed by the revolution? It wouldn't be worth making it just to continue being the same." Only Anarchism can create the "the possibility of a society in which the needs of life may be fully supplied for all, and in which the opportunities for complete development of mind and body shall be the heritage of all", to use Voltairine de Cleyre's words.

We suffer the *Now*, we can envision the After – it is up to us whether we can turn our dreams into reality.

> "what means can the State provide to abolish this [capitalist] monopoly that the working class could not find in its own strength and groups? [...] Could its governmental machine, developed for the creation and upholding of these [capitalist] privileges, now be used to abolish them? Would not the new function require new organs? And these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in *their* unions, *their* federations, completely outside the State?"

In other words, it is a case of creating the new world while fighting the current one.

Thus, to quote Kropotkin again, "the direct struggle of Labour against Capital [...] while serving far more powerfully than any indirect action to secure some improvements in the life of the worker and opening up the eyes of the workers to the evil done to society by capitalist organisation and by the State that upholds it, [...] also awakes in the worker thoughts concerning the forms of consumption, production and direct exchange between those concerned, without the intervention of the capitalist and the State." For example, "[a]ny strike trains the participants for a common management of affairs" and the same can be said of community struggles.

As well as breaking the mental chains produced by being born into and having to survive within a hierarchical society, as well as getting us used to managing our own fates, the class struggle also create the structures of a free society. Thus, to use Bakunin's words, "[t]he organisation of the trade sections, their federation [....] by the Chambers of Labour [...] combining theory and practice [...] also bear in themselves the living germs of *the new social order*, which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."

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as now, be in power! Which means that anarchists do not envision a perfect world, just a better one… and, we can all agree, that would *not* be hard.

Which is why Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* is so good. For those who are unaware of this classic book, it is a "warts and all" Science-Fiction work imagining of an anarchist society – in both its good points *and* its possible problems and dangers. It shows an appealing society but one in which co-operation has started to become conformity and federation has started to become bureaucracy. Yet, crucially, it also showed the role of minorities in challenging these developments.

As Kropotkin recognised in *Mutual Aid*, "there is, and always has been, […] the self-assertion of the individual […] in its much more important although less evident function of breaking through the bonds, always prone to become crystallised, which the tribe, the village community, the city, and the State impose upon the individual. In other words, there is the self-assertion of the individual taken as a progressive element." As such, a free society would not see the role of rebels ended – they would still exist, as Le Guin imagined, even in the best society you can imagine.

Anarchists, then, are realistic and recognise that achieving Anarchy does not negate the need for rebels for, as Kropotkin put it, "*variety, conflict even, is life, and that uniformity is death*" – and this, I must reiterate, applies to an Anarchy as much as today.

The link between *Now* and *After*

I have sketched what is wrong about what *Now* and indicated how that informs an appealing and plausible *After* – how do we get from the one to the other? The answer has been indicated but Kropotkin put it well in *Modern Science and Anarchy*:

ciation, federalism, elections, mandates and recall – hierarchy and bureaucracy can gestate anywhere.

Anarchists do not believe people are inherently good – for if we did, how could we explain the rise of property and government? No, people have the potential for being good and bad and which predominates depends on the social environment. Which means that, yes, people can be bad – yet this is not an argument against anarchy. Why? Well, if humanity *is* bad, then why give flawed, bad people power over others? As Kropotkin noted long ago:

> "We maintain that *both* rulers and ruled are spoiled by authority; *both* exploiters and exploited are spoiled by exploitation [...] *We* admit the imperfections of human nature, but we make no exception for the rulers. *They* make it, although sometimes unconsciously, and because we make no such exception, they say that we are dreamers, 'unpractical men.'"

So there will be anti-social individuals, individual conflict, disagreements within a libertarian socialist society and we argue for processes based on voluntary arbitration to resolve them. Moreover, we see mutual aid and solidarity as the best defence against the anti-social and power-seekers:

> "Provided that you yourself do not abdicate your freedom, provided that you yourself do not allow others to enslave you; and provided that to the violent and anti-social passions of this or that person you oppose your equally vigorous social passions, you have nothing to fear from liberty"

Simply put, there will always be arseholes.... the difference would be that there will be fewer of them and they would not,

We are all familiar with John Lennon's musical take on Communism and its refrain of "imagine all the people". It has become a bit of a cliché, but we should never forget that dreams *are* important. As Rudolf Rocker put it in his memoirs of his activism in London:

> "People may [...] call us dreamers [...] They fail to see that dreams are also a part of the reality of life, that life without dreams would be unbearable. No change in our way of life would be possible without dreams and dreamers. The only people who are never disappointed are those who never hope and never try to realise their hope."

Tonight I am going to discuss these dreams and show that they are more than that because they are rooted in a firm understanding of what is wrong with society and how we can change it.

Now...

It is important to note that Anarchists do not abstractly compare now to an ideal.

Rather, as Proudhon and Kropotkin stressed, we analyse tendencies within current society. There are two kinds – some reinforce present inequalities while others undermine these and point beyond them. We build our hopes and dreams on the latter which fighting the former. In addition, we analyse past social movements and revolutions in order to learn from the past, rather than repeat it.

This means we build a theory and a movement based on combining analysis and activity, one which rejects wishful thinking and unrealistic assumptions, one which I must stress is not a prescription but rather presents principles and suggestions which can and must be tailored to specific situations and needs.

Simply put, the notion that we can produce detailed descriptions of a free society is false – blueprints will never match the needs of a dynamic and evolving society nor the struggles and activities required to create it.

So what is wrong with capitalism? This is no idle query for what is wrong with capitalism shapes what we think should replace it. The main issues with modern society are obvious: property, statism, personal and institutional hierarchies (such as sexism, racism, homophobia, sectarianism, etc.) and ecological destruction. These are all connected and interwoven for anarchism is, as Kropotkin put it, "on one side, criticism of hierarchical organisations and authoritarian conceptions in general; and, on the other side, the analysis of tendencies that are emerging in the progressive movements of humanity – in the past and especially in modern times." Thus, for example, the "capitalist principle" and the "governmental principle" are "one and the same principle" as Proudhon argued long ago.

Property, to use Proudhon's words again, "is despotism" as it produces a system in which workers sell their arms and liberty to the master class. Property "is theft" for, as a result, workers are exploited within production and wealth floods upwards into the hands of a few. For the many it is grim – "the worker is subordinated, exploited: his permanent condition is one of obedience and poverty" – and profit, rent and interest are all little more than a tax on being alive.

Much the same can be said of the State as the few, whether elected or not, rule and exploit the many in a centralised, top-down structure. This inevitably produces a bureaucracy, which is the real power in the State due to its permanency. Thus, in a so-called democratic State, the sovereign people alienate their power into the hands of a few elected politicians who are subject to pressures from capitalists and bureaucrats. More, the State exists to defends property and its power.

This system impacts negatively on the ecology of our planet. Capitalism is based on grow or die – we need not ponder

level when deciding what to co-ordinate. This means that federations would organise large-scale investments (whether social or economic) as well as mutual support and co-operation.

Libertarian Socialism

Which means we have a definition of an Anarchy – a free individuals freely joining free associations within free federations.

This would be based upon and encourage, as Kropotkin stressed, i*ndividualisation* and not the self-defeating "individualism" of capitalism. This is because the free individual "secures equality in all personal relationships with his [or her] co-members" for "without communism man will never be able to reach that full development of individuality which is, perhaps, the most powerful desire of every thinking being" – not least because it would "guarantee to all well-being and even luxury by only asking man for a few hours of work per day instead of the whole day". It would also allow a "variety of occupations and organising in such a way so that man is not only absolutely free during his hours of leisure but also that he can vary his work, and that from childhood education prepares him for this [...] is again to free the individual; it is to open the doors wide for his complete development in every direction".

In short, a world fit for humans to life in rather than, as now, one in which the many survive.

Utopian, some may say. Yet anarchists are not utopians for we recognise that no system is perfect. This is for the very sound reason that people are not perfect and will never be (that is evolution for you!). Therefore we are always aware of the danger that even the best individuals and best organisation can become corrupted, can fail. That is why we advocate free asso-

and not representatives (politicians) – as would, of course, be those of the agricultural-industrial federation.

Socio-Economic Federalism

Just as individuals need to work together within associations, so there is a need to co-operate above the association level. Hence the need for federations – which would exist in addition to free agreements ("contracts") between associations.

These federal councils would be of varying degrees of temporality – ad-hoc, occasional and the more or less permanent. Which is suitable would depend on the objective needs of each specific situation or function. Again, regardless of their duration, these would be councils of *delegates* rather than representatives for, as Proudhon argued during the 1848 Revolution the "choice of talents, the imperative mandate, and permanent revocability are the most immediate and incontestable consequences of the electoral principle. It is the inevitable program of all democracy." This would allow the individuals in the base assemblies to have the final say for, to quote Proudhon again, "the federative system is the opposite of administrative and governmental hierarchy or centralisation".

So why federations? Simply to organise activities of joint interest and need. As Proudhon argued, federation would be based on "the initiative of communes and departments as to works that operate within their jurisdiction" in addition to "the initiative of the workers companies as to carrying the works out". This is because "the direct, sovereign initiative of localities, in arranging for public works that belong to them, is a consequence of the democratic principle and the free contract".

Needless to say, myths notwithstanding, anarchists are not opposed to large scale industry. Rather, we are in favour of *appropriate* technological levels – where what is appropriate is based on *human* criteria rather than profits or ideology. Federations, likewise, would likewise operate on an appropriate

too long the unsustainability of infinite expansion within a finite eco-system. Yet ecological problems are not limited to just capitalism for the domination of ecology is, as Murray Bookchin argued, rooted in domination within humanity. Ultimately, centralistion of power, whether economic or political, reduces diversity and monocultures are not ecologically viable – eco-systems need diversity. Simply put, as Élisée Reclus argued, the current system drives ecological destruction:

> "it matters little to the industrialist [...] whether he blackens the atmosphere with fumes [...] or contaminates it with foul-smelling vapours [...] Since nature is so often desecrated by speculators precisely because of its beauty, it is not surprising that farmers and industrialists, in their own exploitative endeavours, fail to consider whether they contribute to defacing the land."

Therefore all our problems are, at root, driven by one thing: hierarchy or what anarchists used to call "the principle of authority". As Proudhon memorably put it:

> "To be *governed* is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so.... To be *governed* is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under the pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolised, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed;

> then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonoured. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality."

And this applies within work as outwith it, with the petty authority of the boss just as degrading to the human spirit as that of the bureaucrat or the politician.

After...

So that is what is wrong, that is why we want to transform society. This is what drives our dreams and hopes of the future society.

However, we libertarians reject the *a priori* "organisation of labour" so beloved of a certain type of socialist. This is because labour must organise itself for the simple reason that, to quote Kropotkin, the "changes that will result from the social revolution will be so immense and so profound [...] that it will be impossible for one or even a number of individuals to elaborate the [new] social forms [This] can only be the collective work of the masses." This means that "[t]o make a revolution it is not [...] enough that there should be [...] [popular] risings [...] It is necessary that after the risings there should be something new in the institutions [of society], which would permit new forms of life to be elaborated and established."

This is what I will seek to indicate now, based on a few general principles developed from our critique of capitalism and an analysis of previous social movements and revolutions.

The first is free association which means, to quote Proudhon, that "[t]here will no longer be nationality, no longer fatherland,

Social Structure

Now we turn to the social structure. This is more straightforward in many ways as people have always lived in communities while complex industrial economics are a more recent development. Yet here we follow the same path as in the economic structure as we can easily see how community revolt can be transformed into communal assemblies. As Bakunin argued:

> "The Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates from each barricade [...] vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates"

Thus the class struggle is the means by which community self-government can be created – or, more correctly, recreated as this has existed long before the State appeared. This is the only way in which people can manage their common affairs. To use Kropotkin's conclusions from his study of the French Revolution of 1793:

> "The 'permanence' of the general assemblies of the sections – that is, the possibility of calling the general assembly whenever it was wanted by the members of the section and of discussing everything in the general assembly [...] will educate every citizen politically [...] The section in permanence – the forum always open – is the only way [...] to assure an honest and intelligent administration."

These community groupings and federations would be based on committees of elected, mandated and recallable *delegates*

the symptom: slavery the disease. The extremes of riches and destitution follow inevitably upon the extremes of license and bondage. The many are not enslaved because they are poor, they are poor because they are enslaved." This means that the "key to real efficiency is self-government; and any system that is not based upon self-government is not only servile, but also inefficient. Just as the labour of the wage-slave is better than the labour of the chattel-slave, so [...] will the labour of the free man [and woman] be better than either."

Which means that capitalism and its hierarchies and inequalities are damned as not only being unjust and immoral but also a hinderance to productivity – the very thing they are meant to foster.

So economic liberty means self-management in the workplace, industrial democracy. But just as no man is an island, so no workplace is self-sufficient. What would be the relations between associations? Different libertarian socialist schools of thought have different ideas on the subject.

All, however, have a common basis in self-management (use rights) – as Noam Chomsky said, a "consistent anarchist must oppose private ownership of the means of production and the wage slavery which is a component of this system" – and all see the need for an agro-industrial federation for regulation, cooperation and mutual support as well as free agreement ("contracts") between self-managed workplaces.

Mutualism is a market socialism based on competitive exchange of products of labour (but not labour itself), *Collectivism* sees the exchange of products as being based on labour-value pricing while *Communism* (*libertarian*, of course!) favours distribution according to need rather than deed (and would need an agreed basis to evaluate costs and alternatives). Needless to say, any real revolution will see all tried – and others (including non-anarchist ones).

in the political sense of the words: they will mean only places of birth. Whatever a man's race or colour, he is really a native of the universe; he has citizen's rights everywhere" – in the community, in the workplace, in the home, in the club, everywhere.

The next is the awareness of what is important. As Kropotkin stressed:

> "Under the name of profits, rent, interest upon capital [...] economists have eagerly discussed the benefits which the owners of land or capital [...] can derive [...] from the under-paid work of the wage-labourer [...] the great question 'What have we to produce, and how?' necessarily remained in the background... The main subject of social economy – that is, the *economy of energy required for the satisfaction of human needs* is consequently the last subject which one expects to find treated in a concrete form in economical treatises."

This perspective applies to all aspects of life – political (more correctly, *social*), economic and individual (interpersonal relationships). It would be based on socialisation to ensure the end of master-servant relations, the abolition of the State, the abolition of property and wage-labour and the abolition of "private" hierarchies (most obviously, patriarchal marriage).

Or, more positively, association or self-management. Just as capitalism is an economy but not all economies are capitalist, so the State is a social organisation but not all social organisations are States.

Economic Structure

I will start with the economic aspects of anarchy for no reason other than that we need to start somewhere.

Economic liberty will come about by winning the class war, in other words turning the Strike Committee into the Workplace Committee when "*the workers, organised by trades [...] seize all branches of industry* [and] *manage* these industries for the benefit of society", to use Kropotkin's words. This would be the means by which wage-slavery is replaced by workers' self-management – and this is key as Herbert Read put it in *Anarchy and Order*:

> "The essential principle of anarchism is that mankind has reached a stage of development at which it is possible to abolish the old relationship of master-man (capitalist-proletarian) and substitute a relationship of egalitarian co-operation. This principle is based, not only on ethical ground, but also on economic grounds."

Simply put, as Bakunin recognised, **"**[o]nly associated labour [...] is adequate to the task of maintaining [...] civilised society".

This requires socialisation. Why? It is needed for **s**elf-management of production, As Proudhon put it in 1840, in the same work he proclaimed himself an anarchist, in a genuinely socialist workplace the "leaders [...] must be chosen from the workers by the workers themselves, and must fulfil the conditions of eligibility." To achieve this, as he explained six years later, all workers have to "straightway enjoy the rights and prerogatives of associates and even managers [...] In order that association may be real, he who participates in it must do so [...] an active factor; he must have a deliberative voice in the council [...] everything regarding him, in short, should be regulated in accordance with equality". Only this could ensure that "an industrial democracy must follow industrial feudalism", to use his words from 1857.

This required free access – or socialisation. Rejecting capitalism and State-socialism, this would – as he put it in 1846 –

require "a solution based on equality [...] the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property." Thus "under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social* ownership", in the words of a manifesto he issued during the height of the 1848 Revolution.

Can self-management work? In terms of ending despotism in production, the evidence is clear from an example of an actual revolution as Emma Goldman recounted of her time in revolutionary Catalonia:

> "I was especially impressed with the replies to my questions as to what actually had the [Spanish] workers gained by the collectivisation [...] the answer always was, first, greater freedom. And only secondly, more wages and less time of work. In two years in Russia [1920–21] I never heard any workers express this idea of greater freedom."

The workers and peasants of Spain created a war industry to help fight Franco and kept the economy going in the extremely difficult circumstances of a civil war at the height of the Great Depression. Yet we do not need to look at revolutionary situations for the evidence is also clear from experiments conducted under capitalism. Thus, as Alan S. Blinder summarised in his book *Paying for Productivity*, there is a "positive link between profit sharing and productivity" and the "evidence is strongly suggestive that for employee ownership [...] to have a strong impact on performance, it needs to be accompanied by provisions for worker participation in decision making". Moreover, "narrow differences in wages and status [...] increase productivity".

This shows the power of economic liberty – for we should never forget, to use the words of Guild Socialist G. D. H. Cole in his book *Self-Government in Industry*, that "[p]overty is