

How To Write A Social Revolution

A Guide To Changing Fictional Worlds

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It feels like everything is falling apart.

The planet is simultaneously flooded and on fire, wars are raging, prices are hiking, and fascism is rising. We live in an age of crisis as capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and the state aim to retain their stranglehold on our world. My generation faces a future of profound uncertainty, as the basic means of subsistence—especially food and shelter—are becoming increasingly inaccessible to the vast majority of us. Movements of various political flavours have arisen in response to these conditions, but the machine seems to continue unperturbed. For those of us who haven't completely given up on the fate of the world, we're looking for ways to change our trajectory. We want to know what we can do to help.

Our situation calls for real change. It calls for more than just resistance. It calls for revolution. Social revolution: what anarchists propose for a complete transformation of our society, economy, culture, philosophy, technology, relationships, and politics. Of course, that would be illegal, so while our situation may call for it, I cannot. As we all know, legality is what determines morality. However, if we're operating in the world of fiction, we can explore the practical components of social revolution. If our characters are facing apocalyptic collapse in their lifetimes and they're seeking real change, the answer is social revolution.

Now, people have a habit of conflating revolution with insurrection or coup d'états. A lot of works of fiction make this mistake, seemingly drawing from the flashy imagery of the Storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution, and that has become the image of revolution in popular culture. A final climactic showdown between the masses and the footsoldiers of empire. The smell of smoke and gunpowder in the air. The roar of a bloodthirsty crowd. The burning sensation of tear gas overcoming one's senses. Eventually, success comes with the replacement of one set of rulers with another. A lot of modern-day wannabe socialist and even anarchist revolutionaries still hold to this misconception of what a revolution entails. The way they talk about revolution as some distant future event with a clear before and after betrays that kind of mentality. It's practically millenarian, as though they're waiting for the Second Coming of Karl Marx to bestow the capital-R Revolution upon the masses.

But if you're trying to write a realistic anarchist social revolution in a fictional modern-day setting, then as Alexander Berkman put it, you need a revolution "that seeks to alter the whole character of society." In case you didn't know, anarchism is a political philosophy and movement based in opposition to all forms of hierarchical control and promotion of a society within which individuals can freely cooperate together as equals. The social revolution that anarchists seek requires people transforming society and transforming themselves in the process. It is not a sudden flipping of the switch, but a gradual change in people's powers, drives, and consciousness. Social revolution is an ongoing process, not a singular event. Social revolution is heterogeneous and dynamic, not religiously uniform. It may be punctuated by major ruptures and advances, but it requires a range of tactics informed by a variety of strategies built upon an array of short-term and long-term goals. It starts here and now, developing people's nascent anarchic tendencies. A social revolution takes years of social struggle breaking down all forms of oppression and creating new ways of living. In a phrase, a social revolution requires revolutionaries that both oppose and propose.

This is a hopefully comprehensive guide to what that looks like.

At the most basic level, a social revolution requires the cooperation of multiple people. One potential form that cooperation can take is the **affinity group**. Affinity groups are small groups of anarchists who work together to spread anarchic ideas to the wider culture. Their work re-

quires a combination of actions that both oppose and propose, particularly in the realm of education, where affinity groups must simultaneously expand people's consciousness of systems of oppression and demonstrate the possibilities of alternatives. Additionally, affinity groups seek to develop the anarchic powers and capacities of people in mass movements, unions, and communities to engage in direct action and learn to manage their own affairs without hierarchy. Affinity groups may host workshops and skillshares where they can disseminate skills and build connections in their communities. Within affinity groups, folks can fill different roles in developing agitprop, which is the intentional promotion of ideas through literature, music, poetry, theatre, film, illustration, social media, and other forms of political art. Don't underestimate the potential ripple effects a small network of affinity groups can have on the broader zeitgeist.

Oppose

Political action to oppose can generally be divided further into two major groups: acts of confrontation, which require less people but involve more risk, and acts of noncooperation, which require more people but involve slightly less risk due to safety in numbers.

Acts of Confrontation

Let's begin with acts of confrontation.

Protests are a very public form of sometimes indirect, sometimes direct political action that anarchists may utilise in order to raise awareness and keep the spirit of revolt alive and well. Protest, when executed correctly, is a sign that people are thinking and acting for themselves and against what authorities want them to do. However, protesting is very risky. Even nonviolent protests can be subject to severe, violent retribution, either from counter-protestors or from the agents of the state. Organisers have been assassinated, gone missing, or been imprisoned. Plus protests don't usually have much control over their messaging, making them vulnerable to the highly developed propaganda machine of corporate media. Alternative media organised by affinity groups can help spread the truth about protests, but they can't always compete. Still, political protest in the context of a broader social revolution is both powerful and necessary to resist oppression.

Keep in mind that anarchists' engagement with protests is not based on a desire to lobby those in power for change. The lobbying approach typically results in a highly hierarchical and disempowered movement, where the masses below do the work and take on the risk, while an elite minority of activists rub shoulders with politicians and lose touch with the cause. Lobbying requires compromise, while anarchists recognise that the unyielding persistence of a radical movement can produce reforms without ever limiting themselves to reforms. The Zapatistas were able to gain and maintain the land they now hold because a government, even a "progressive" government, does not give away some of its power unless it is scared of losing all of its power. Rather than expending time, resources, and energy trying to convince or change a government, movements can focus on building up a real threat that can drive a hard bargain through direct forms of action.

Direct action means working to accomplish goals directly rather than relying on authorities or representatives as intercessors. But crucially, direct action requires a security culture capable of protecting its perpetrators from the law. Again, I'm not advocating for anything illegal, just

describing how an anarchist social revolution works. A security culture is an instinctive set of customs developed and shared by a community whose members may be targeted by the government, designed to minimize risk. The central principle of security culture is that people should never be privy to any sensitive information they do not need to know. Don't ask, don't tell. Don't make it easy for your enemies, don't let paranoia overrun your movements, and don't put yourself or others at unnecessary risk. Alongside **support networks** that can lend transportation and safe housing for those involved, much like the underground railroad, having a solid security culture is necessary for the usually very illegal actions that seek to directly confront and dismantle institutions of power.

Obstruction refers to any actions that movements may engage in that seek to delay or cease the operations of those in power by making it physically impossible for them to proceed with their intended actions. Using sheer numbers or shrewd strategies, this can range from a DDoS attack to highway blockades to eviction resistance to the disruption of mining, logging, construction, or drilling activities that are damaging the environment and endangering poor communities. Another usually temporary tactic is occupation, where a collective may squat and hold critical infrastructure such as factories, transportation systems, school buildings, shopping centres, public squares, parks, and empty land or housing in order to force change and construct counter-spaces where protestors may reimagine and transform infrastructure in a way that is conducive to public need rather than state or corporate interest.

If sustained and defended, occupation can eventually lead to **reclamation**, such as when the workers' occupations in Argentina during the 2001 economic crisis led to the creation of self-managed cooperatives. The Reclaim The Streets movement is another example of reclamation, where communities have "invaded" roads or highways to stage a party with free food and music, opening up the space we have lost to car-centric infrastructure. Land and housing can be secured, cooperatives can be developed, streets can be pedestrianised, and the commons can be reclaimed through sustained and defended occupation.

Expropriation is another example of direct action in the style of Robin Hood, "liberating" food, medicine, money, supplies, or equipment from the rich and distributing them to the people. Historically, many affinity groups have engaged in bank robberies and other forms of theft in order to finance their revolutionary activities, propaganda, and bails from prison. New Afrikan anarchist Kuwasi Balagoon was imprisoned for an attempted bank robbery in order to fund Black Liberation Army activities and Lucio Urtubia was a Spanish anarchist known for his practice of expropriative anarchism.

However, sometimes revolutionaries seek **sabotage and destruction** instead of expropriation. Whether merely threatened or actually carried out, destruction of property during riots or other political activities has a long and proud history of success. From individual acts of sabotage during slavery to MK guerillas' bombings of the communications, transit, and energy infrastructure that helped run the South African Apartheid economy to Indigenous activists in Canada sabotaging efforts to start fracking near their land.

Lastly, there are acts of confrontation that involve **violence against humans**, which I must repeat that I do not support. This violence can be either offensive or defensive, organised by militias or undertaken by individuals, but ultimately it aims to make being a rapist, a fascist, an officer, a capitalist, or a politician a very dangerous position to be in. In a society where the power-hungry already rule, during the process of social revolution, people will gain their freedom by overthrowing every existing and would-be authority and defending against those

who seek to re-impose that authority through self-managed forms of self-defence, because the freedom anarchists seek does not include the freedom to oppress others. Organised militias will be necessary to defend revolutionary gains.

Acts of Noncooperation

On the other side of the “oppose” coin are acts of noncooperation, either political, social, or economic. Strikes are perhaps one of the most well-recognised forms of revolutionary noncooperative political action, but people underestimate exactly how powerful and multifaceted a strike can be. There are different types of strikes that encompass different segments of the population and target different segments of the system.

Labour strikes are a mass refusal of workers to work. Labour strikes can occur in a specific workplace, a specific industry, or in the case of a general strike, across multiple industries. Strikes can be organised and called for by unions or they can be organised without the approval of unions and with significantly more risk, as with wildcat strikes. For anarchists, wildcat strikes are necessary to circumvent the capitulatory and bureaucratic nature of some unions, as very few unions these days are actually revolutionary, and, due to the rise of the high-turnover, atomised jobs of the service economy, very few workers are unionised.

Strikes are born from the recognition that capitalists need labour, not the other way around. Particularly for movements with radical aims, a well-defended and well-supported general strike can play a powerful role in the rupture of the capitalist state of affairs and reclamation of the means of production. However, it isn't easy to achieve a general strike. Alki made an excellent video on the topic, but in short, a general strike needs support from a mass grassroots coalition of radical political, social, and labour organisations. It won't be achieved via Reddit.

Student strikes bring together affinity groups within educational institutions and mobilise specific classes or entire student bodies to protest issues in politics and academics, without waiting to be legitimised by the channels of authority. Students can use their campus as a space to meet, study material conditions, and create spaces to strengthen the autonomy of students to direct their own education and develop a kaleidoscope of academic possibilities.

Rent strikes are a method of resistance tenants can use against landlords where they collectively refuse to pay rent. They can operate as part of an effort to occupy and reclaim housing or they can just push particular demands such as better conditions or lowered rents. A rent strike needs three basic elements in order to succeed: shared dissatisfaction among tenants, outreach to build numbers and therefore the threat of the strike, and finally, support, both legal support and physical support against evictions.

Taxpayer strikes, or organised tax resistance, refers to a collective refusal to pay tax. Governments have always struggled with tax noncompliance and the tactic has been used effectively to supplement protests against wars or, in the case of the Indian independence movement, against the colonial state.

Debt strikes are a method of collective debt resistance that aims to break down current debt dogma and free people and communities from the stranglehold of debt. Organisations such as Strike Debt purchase and forgive monetary debt through the Rolling Jubilee program and organise debt strikes where debtors defer their loan payments as a method of mass financial civil disobedience.

On the consumer side of things, **boycotts** are a popular form of collective action and passive resistance. Though not as effective as they used to be, due to the multinational and conglomerate nature of today's capitalism, on a targeted small-scale or a well-coordinated large scale, if organised into mass movements and undertaken in coordination with sympathetic strikes, consumer boycotts can have some impact in the social revolutionary struggle. Then again, boycotts don't have to be limited to boycotts against businesses. Leveraging numbers to apply social sanctions can force change in other settings. Other acts of noncooperation may also include **conscientious objection** for draftees, **mutiny** and **insubordination** for soldiers and other government workers, and social pressure through the **shunning** of class traitors, scabs, racists, sexists, and others who act to uphold oppressive systems.

Propose

Today is the shadow of tomorrow

Today is the present future of yesterday

Yesterday is the shadow of today

The darkness of the past is yesterday

And the light of the past is yesterday

Between the acts of confrontation and acts of noncooperation I've just outlined, I believe that pretty much exhausts the "oppose" side of the expression. Now we can turn to the side of social revolution that undertakes political action to propose and build alternatives.

This is the aim of prefigurative politics, which is the deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations, institutions, infrastructure, and practices in the here and now. The anarchist argument for social revolution is not that political means and ends should be linked in important ways, but that they already are. Today is the preview of tomorrow. Thus, it is vital that organisational practices prefigure liberatory and not authoritarian forms. That means developing people's powers, drives, and consciousness in a way that is conducive to anarchic social change.

Powers refers to people's capacity to do or be. Both individual and collective powers are determined by the natural, historical, and especially social contexts folks find themselves in. Therefore, movements must be structured in a way that helps members develop the powers needed to organise horizontally and spread this form of organisation to others. There is a strong connection between the powers to develop and appreciate free and equal social relations and the drives to establish and enhance them, because drives are also shaped by social contexts. Lastly, consciousness enables people to contemplate and alter their activity as needed. Radical education helps people to develop forms of consciousness which enable them to better understand, assess, orient themselves in, and change their society.

Now let's talk prefigurative politics.

Mutual aid must be a foundational concept in any social revolutionary project. Put simply, mutual aid is a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions by building relationships, networks of reciprocity, and communal autonomy from the state. Mutual aid may involve work to support people impacted by harmful systems and work to create alternative infrastructure. It can take the form of

ride-sharing, disaster response, food distribution, and much more, as you'll soon see. However, those engaging in mutual aid must ask themselves if their actions are providing material relief, avoiding legitimising oppressive systems, mobilising people for ongoing struggle, and accommodating marginalised groups. Mutual aid is not meant to be charity. It must actively cultivate liberatory skills, practices, and solidarity.

In *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, Black anarchist and former Panther Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin wrote about the need to create **survival programmes** to feed, house, and serve poor and working people facing life-altering conditions. Survival programmes are based in a specific geographical region, where members of a community get together to meet specific needs in their area, with the aim of building connections, consciousness, and eventually popular assemblies. A **popular assembly** is a free association of members of a community gathered with the aim of self-management. Popular assemblies allow community problems and improvements to be identified and solved directly, drawing upon the ideas and experiences of everyone and enriched by discussion and debate. Decisions may be made via consensus or through other forms of decision-making, such as liquid democracy, majority vote, or supermajority vote. Within a popular assembly, affinity groups may form to advocate their specific interests in a coordinated manner. The town of Cherán in Mexico provides just one example of successful community control, where the community armed themselves, kicked out the police, the cartels, and the local government, and organised popular assemblies to manage their own affairs.

Popular assemblies will need to network and confederate with other popular assemblies and revolutionary organisations in order to build their collective power and autonomy. For example, communities will need to develop their capacity to feed themselves. Urban agriculture might be able to supplement dietary needs, but ultimately, community-supported agriculture provides a more robust alternative in the long term. Community-supported agriculture or crop sharing is a system that connects producers and consumers within the food system without a middleman by allowing the consumer to subscribe to the harvest of a certain farm or group of farms. For the purpose of revolution, crop sharing can connect farming cooperatives with popular assemblies to develop an alternative economy.

A cooperative is simply an autonomous association of people united to meet their common economic, social, and/or cultural needs and aspirations through a collectively-owned and democratically-controlled organisation. Cohousing cooperatives deal with housing, workers cooperatives deal with various industries including food, healthcare, transportation, construction, and clothing, credit unions deal with finance, including potentially financing revolutionary projects, platform cooperatives deal with websites or apps, and utility cooperatives deal with the provision of utilities in a community or region. Makerspaces, coding spaces, and cooperative labs can create room for research and innovation in revolutionary projects, bringing together people with diverse sets of skills to collaborate and find solutions to the issues raised by the broader community.

As I discussed in my videos on the library economy and the commons, **the reclamation of the commons** is absolutely vital to revolution. In brief, the commons refers to any collectively managed natural or man-made resource system, such as a community land trust, a local forest, a shared pasture, or a renewable energy system. Revolutionaries can engage in building full-fledged library economies based on the commons. This can take the form of tool libraries, vehicle libraries, clothing libraries, furniture libraries, and more in an effort to curb overproduction, end planned obsolescence, and provide access to an irreducible minimum for all.

Revolutionaries can also establish **childcare collectives and free schools**. Free schools are autonomous, non-hierarchical spaces intended for educational exchange and skills sharing. They reject the subordination of students to teachers and organise classes in a way that promotes critical consciousness across a variety of subjects. From nursery through college, in community centres, parks, libraries, and other shared spaces, learners and facilitators can collaborate to develop and self-manage an autonomous education system that can dispense knowledge and skills among the community. Free children beget a free society, and education should facilitate their freedom.

Communities must also develop **methods of conflict resolution and new systems of justice**. Mistakes and disagreements are inevitable, so there must be some means in place for discussing, deciding, and resolving conflict and incidents within and between communities, cooperatives, and individuals in a healthy and effective way, such as through arbitration, mediation, or conciliation. Community defence against domination and abuses of power requires a system of justice capable of responding to harmful behaviour. How that manifests is subject to much debate among anarchists and abolitionists, so I will reserve that discussion for a future video.

Conclusion

Oppose and propose. Propose and oppose. Confrontation, noncooperation, and prefiguration. A variety of organisations and individuals undertaking a variety of roles, tactics, and strategies in a variety of settings in concert to develop the revolution. Supporters unable to directly engage helping fund the projects of these movements. Ultimately, the social revolution is a movement from below, by and for the oppressed to achieve their own freedom.

It is an ongoing process to make society more diverse, open, and free. Expanding pockets of social change around the world until new examples of what life could be are made known to all. Remember that even in struggle, it's not just serious business. Revolution can and should be fun—a carnival of the oppressed. It's about making life worth living. It's about emancipating people. As Emma Goldman said, "If I can't dance, it's not my revolution."

Remember that "It always seems impossible until it's done."

All power to all the people.

Peace.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfJMVb34FCo>

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