

# **Anarchism, a History of Anti-Racism**

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*“What do we mean by respect for humanity? We mean the recognition of human right and human dignity in every man, of whatever race [or] color”*

– Michael Bakunin, 1867

Anarchists are Free Socialists so we believe that social equality and opportunity for all people should replace property, wealth and privilege as the key value of society. We also believe that so long as governments exist, they are a means to create and preserve inequality. Anarchists believe that social equality cannot be achieved without Free Association, Mutual Aid and Voluntary Cooperation. Anarchists hold that until all are free then no one is free. We believe that it is human nature to be aware of the suffering of others and that our own freedom is dependent on our willingness to fight for the freedom of others. As such it's hardly surprising that Anarchists oppose racism and were frequently to be found at the heart of anti-racist struggles.

Michael Bakunin (Three Lectures to Swiss Members of the International, 1871) attacked the State as ‘the patrimony of some privileged class’ and patriotism as “the solidaristic interest of this privileged class.”

Furthermore, “patriotism is a bad, narrow, and disastrous habit, for it is the negation of human equality and solidarity.” He stated that “no war between races, nations, States, and classes has ever had any purpose other than domination, which is the necessary condition and guarantee of the possession and enjoyment of wealth.” Furthermore, “at the bottom of every war lies but a single concern: plunder, the acquisition of others’ wealth, and the subjugation of others’ labor!” To Bakunin, the State was a set of institutions which protected the money and property of the rich and patriotism both enabled the rich to divide those who they exploited and to justify wars to make themselves richer. He criticized the nationalistic and imperialistic wars waged by France, Germany and Russia in the mid 1800s. He also criticized the use of religion to rationalize this exploitation and war.

Peter Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902) was one of the first books to attack Social Darwinism, the theoretical basis of white supremacy. Kropotkin asserted that evolution was driven by cooperation and not by competition and exploitation. He challenged the idea that some people were destined to rule over others by saying that it was our natural instinct to be repulsed by injustice and exploitation. He challenged the idea that people were parochial/tribal by nature by saying that great human advances resulted from cooperation and not separatism or domination.

Rudolf Rocker’s *Nationalism and Culture* (1937) was one of the seminal works of Anti-Racism, Anti-Fascism and Anti-Nationalism. Rocker, a German Anarcho-Syndicalist who escaped the Nazis, asserts that nationalism is the basis of Fascist and Stalinist tyranny and that white supremacist doctrine which was written to justify European aristocracy and nationalism is contradicted by all basic facts of biology, genetics and psychology. European race theorists even contradicted each other.

## **Anarchists in the International Labor Movement**

By the turn of the century Anarchist ideas had spread rapidly outside the European working class and had become popular among the workers of Asia (in particular Korea, China and Japan) and Latin America. In Eastern Europe Anarchism became popular amongst Jewish communities

and as people from these communities fled poverty and pogroms they brought Anarchist ideas into the USA and Britain. In the US the Anarchist influenced IWW was the first union to jointly organize 'white' workers, Black workers and Chinese immigrants. In Cuba, anti-racism was a key part of Anarchist labor organizing among freed slaves.

Anarchists organized unions and fought against the Spanish occupation and the late US intervention. By the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Anarchism was already a multi-cultural movement that had spread throughout the global working class. The waves of repression against Anarchists alongside the poverty of the communities many of them came from meant that in many countries the movement included immigrants from all over the world.

In areas where the Anarchist movement was strong this opposition to racism and imperialism was translated into action. In 1909 Barcelona Anarchists played a major role in initiating a general strike against military conscription for the war in Morocco. In 1912 Anarchists played a significant role in the Mexican revolution with indigenous movements like the Zapatistas taking up the Anarchist demand for 'Land and Liberty' and hundreds of IWW members joining the Mexican Anarchists in liberating a large section of Northern Mexico.

In "Labor's Solidarity Should Know Neither Race Nor Color" (Regeneración, 1913), the Mexican Anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon criticized Eugene V. Debs of the American Socialist Party for claiming that Mexicans were "too ignorant to fight for freedom." He urged American and European workers to follow their example.

During the Russian Revolution the Anarchist influenced Makhnovist Army liberated much of the Eastern Ukraine. This area was rife with anti-Semitism, even Red Army units were responsible for as many as 500 deaths in Pogroms in 1919 alone! The Makhnovists provided arms for Jewish communities, allowed Jews to form separate units in their army if they so wished and declared:

"Your revolutionary duty is to stifle all nationalist persecution by dealing ruthlessly with the instigators of anti-Semitic pogroms [racist attacks]..."

## **Anarchists in the Wars Against Fascism**

As Fascism arose in the 1920's and '30's Anarchists were frequently to be found at the heart of the anti-fascist movements. In 1920 in Italy, when the anti-fascist alliance Arditi del Popolo emerged to physically fight the Fascists, Anarchists were often its local organizers. In Spain, the Anarchist CNT (National Labor Confederation) successfully ran the economy of parts of Spain while fighting on two fronts against the Spanish Falangé (Fascists) and their allies: the military, the aristocracy and the church (plus military aid from Mussolini and Hitler) during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). In Japan (1903–23), Anarchists organized against the imperial system and Japanese militarism. Korean Anarchists fought the Japanese invasion of Korea and for a while liberated a large segment of the north of the country. In China, Anarchist guerillas fought the Manchu (Monarchists), Guomindang (Nationalists) and Japanese. Chu Chapei, an Anarchist guerilla organizer in Yunan Province in southern China, patterned himself after Nestor Makhno. Even after the Fascists came to power Anarchists went underground, attempting to assassinate Hitler and Mussolini on several occasions. Many died in concentration camps or were murdered by Stalinists trying to create Russian-styled dictatorships. Anarchists who had participated in the Spanish Civil War escaped to France where they fought with the Maquis (French Resistance

against the Nazis) and to Cuba, Mexico and Argentina where they helped organize Anarchist labor movements.

## **Anarchists in the Struggle Against Imperialism and Neo-Liberalism**

During the 1950s In France the Anarchist Movement opposed the French war against Viet Nam and later reacted to the start of the Algerian war of independence (against France) with the headline “North-Africa: one single people fighting against killer imperialism”. The French Anarchist Federation’s continued opposition to the racist French governments war in Algeria were to see its meetings attacked (on one occasion with guns and grenades), its paper banned several times and in March of 1961 the office of its paper and the Paris bookshop bombed, the huge explosion demolishing the building.

During the 1950s and 1960s Anarchists participated in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. In the 1960s and 1970s Anarchists organized against the American war in Viet Nam. Uprisings in Paris, Mexico City and other placed in 1968 helped spark a growing interest in Anarchist ideas. After the collapse of Leninism in 1989, Anarchist movements appeared in South Africa/ Azania (Workers Solidarity Federation), Nigeria (Awareness League), Turkey, and Lebanon and the movement in Latin America, Asia, Australia and Eastern Europe is growing. Anarchists in Africa are organizing against post-apartheid dictatorships, labor repression and racism. Anarchists have organized movements in opposition to the 1991 ‘Gulf War’ and in solidarity with the indigenous rebellion of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico.

In recent years Anarchists have participated in immigrants rights campaigns in Europe and the United States. Anarchists have organized against “workfare” (Called the “Job Seekers Allowance” in Britain), increased taxation of working people, hunger and the criminalization of homelessness. Anarchists are organizing against neo-fascism, white supremacy and institutional racism by the police, the military and corporations.

Anarchists in the Black Autonomist movement have advocated self-organization within ethnic communities and workplaces as a solution to economic discrimination and institutional racism.

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