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On anarchism and violence

Antti Rautiainen

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Some claim, that anarchism opposes violence, as for anarchists means and ends meet. But only second statement is correct, whereas first is not. This because in anarchism violence is not only means, but in a certain sense a goal in itself.

With this, I do not mean childish boasting about hanging last bourgeois to guts of last priest or anything like that. Destruction of class enemies as individuals is not a revolutionary goal. As Kropotkin wrote, one may hardly avoid some excesses from side of most angered people, but obviously it is goal of anarchists to minimise them.

In the present society, people are first of all victims of their own roles. However, this does not mean that there is no individual responsibility.

In the foundation of any values is the idea, that one must pay for evil deeds. Obviously, this is not an anarchist invention, but an universal principle which is shared by all humanity. There are huge differences of opinions on what deeds are right and what is wrong and how evil should be punished, but the basic principle is agreed by anyone.

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Forgiveness is noble, but only if it is voluntary. The last thing one has right to do is to forgive for someone else! If someone got defamed, beaten up, betrayed or raped, it is his own business should he forgive or demand punishments, no-one else's. I am sure that even Jesus would agree on this.

There are million practical arguments one may present against revenge. Sometimes revenge may lead to an endless cycle of violence, sometimes revenge may hinder wrongdoer to understand his mistakes and to correct his behavior, sometimes revenge may lead to problems, not only for actor but also for people close to him and even comrades, which are completely out of proportion. Sometimes these arguments are a reason enough to avoid revenge. But still, revenge is base of all justice. This because revenge may exist without forgiving, but forgiving may not exist without revenge. If you do not have the option of revenge, your forgiveness is worth of nothing.

Government and norms it creates forbid revenge, and thus deny us the right to be moral subjects. For compensation, system has donated us action movies and endless amount of other entertainment, where issue is revenge has always the central place. We are given the right of revenge only in our fantasies. Only in our dreams we are allowed to be human beings.

Revenge is the basis of all justice on earth. If this is something society may not comprehend, fuck that society.

Let us take the murder of US president William McKinley as an example, committed by anarchist Leon Czolgosz in year 1901. Assassination was followed by a huge wave of repression against anarchists and any socialists. Legislation which was formed those years, among other things banned anarchists from entering United States, and is still in force (luckily this legislation is nowadays seldom executed).

Most of the contemporary anarchists (for example Johann Most) denounced Czolgosz, and even those few who defended him (such as Emma Goldman) rather spoke out for a comrade than for his

act. Czolgosz had no close associates inside anarchist movement. He was obviously a loser, perhaps deranged as well. Many researchers believe he never had a girlfriend. His act did not lead to any positive transformations in the society, he was not even allowed to explain his motivations. He was sentenced hastily, and executed a mere month after the assassination.

But besides everything said afore, president McKinley deserved to die.

In 1898 USS Maine exploded in front of the city of Havana, for reasons still unclear. Back then, Cuba was still Spanish colony, which had often revolted for independence. After explosion of USS Maine, USA declared a war on Spain. As a consequence of the war, Cuba got its independence and Puerto Rico and Philippines became colonies of the United States. However, inhabitants of Philippines did not appreciate their new masters any more than previous ones, and they launched an all-out rebellion for full independence.

President McKinley crushed the rebellion with the same brutality, with which rebellions are crushed always and everywhere. Tens of thousands were executed, raped and robbed, hundreds of thousands died as a result of hunger and illnesses that followed military action and establishment of concentration camps. Nobody knows the exact death toll, but during these years overall population of the islands declined with approximately one million.

Murder of McKinley did not halt the war, it went on for one more year after the assassination. It is possible, that war and atrocities committed by US army in Philippines were not even the main reason for Czolgosz to murder the president.

But who would not rejoice for the fact, that at least one scumbag got what he deserved?

For anarchist, an opportunity of revenge always exists

Government is the monopoly of violence, which takes over all moral issues. Ideal citizen does not intervene to business of the juridicial system, but trusts it to experts. As we give up our right to revenge, state relieves us from the necessity of violence in ex-

change, and promises to take care about it for us. I must admit, that often state fulfills its promise accordingly. Richer the country, more likely that juridicial system punishes those who have done you wrong more effectively, than you would be able to do yourself.

However, in anarchism every individual is an integral part of the governance, all three branches of it – legislative, executive and judicial. Obviously, this intermingling increases risk of lynching and mob stupidity, but even primitive societies and such medieval anarchistic societies as Iceland took steps to create separation of powers at least to some extent. One possible solution is to require everyone to take up responsibility in each of the branches for a limited period, so that no-one is delegated to more than one branch simultaneously. Actually, anarchistic Iceland had a rather complicated legal system. I do not believe that in conditions of a modern society, anarchist legal system would be more simple.

Many confuse violence, power and authority, but all of these are different things and anarchists only oppose the third. Authority is a privilege that is institutionalised, formal, traditional or charismatic. Anarchist does not deny power of experts, as long as it has reasonable limits. Any powers that are based on expert positions should be continuously re-evaluated, and an attempt to fully abolish them should be made with time. That is, anarchism does not attempt to abolish right to use violence, but to distribute this right equally to everyone.

In this respect, it makes no fundamental difference if anarchism has more or less crime than our current society. Anarchistic Iceland was a culture of violent machos, in which any insults were responded with swords. But Icelandic scenario is not the only possibility for anarchism. It is just as possible, that in anarchism people will live like in pictures of Watchtower-journal, in which lions lie in Savannah amongst people and eat fruits. But even if no-one was killed in anarchist society (indeed there have been primitive societies in which murder is an unknown concept), in anarchy ev-

eryone has a potential possibility to give a sentence and to punish. And that, by definition, is violence. Thus anarchism is for violence.