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It's Not Easy Being A Watermelon

Darren Jones

Anarchy and anarchism is a much maligned and misused word. For the vast majority of our society anarchy means chaos or disorder. You have probably already wondered if I make bombs in my spare time or if I have a coloured mohawk? Well sorry to disappoint you, but I don't. The misuse of the word anarchy (both intentional and unintentional) has become so prevalent that in the *Oxford Concise Dictionary* anarchism is defined thus "1. Disorder, especially political or social. 2 lack of government in a society." The legacy of years of misinformation about what anarchy and anarchism are, means that while the first definition is far from what anarchy means, even the second definition is not quite accurate, as anarchists are equally opposed to both statist government and capitalism. This misinformation is typical regarding ideas that threaten to topple the powerful. In the times when monarchies were strong throughout the world, and even during this century, the word 'democracy' was used in precisely the same manner as anarchy and anarchism are used today.

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If one were to believe the popular definition of anarchism, anarchists would be a group of murderers who sought to take all they could from society at the expense of others. Nothing could be further than the truth. Instead, it is those who are in positions of power in our society who more properly fit the popular definition of anarchy. No anarchist would give so much power to such a thing as 'the market', no anarchist would support going to war to protect one group of oil barons from another. The supposed New World Order is clearly an oxymoron. One thing is clear though – in our society being able to take an order is deemed a skill, being able to think, speak and provide for yourself is deemed dangerous. When one strips anarchy down to its Greek roots one finds that it means 'without a ruler' or 'without authority' and this is how anarchists have thought of anarchy. This is why anarchists oppose not just the state but all forms of hierarchical institutions.

This does not mean that anarchists are opposed to organisation. Anarchists recognise that organisation produces results and a social cohesion that is impossible without some form of organisation. As a practical example, anarchists throughout the world manage to produce newspapers, form unions and create community resources such as food and book co-ops. Without organisation, none of this activity would be possible. It would be impossible to change society without organisation. While anarchists do not reject organisation, they do reject hierarchical organisation which seeks to install 'leaders' who will tell 'followers' what they should do. Leadership should come from respect and competency, and should not be based upon domination, but on example.

There is no one school of anarchist thought. However, all anarchists desire a society in which power flows from the mass of society upwards, not from the top downwards as is currently the case. Anarchism is not strictly an ideology but a flexible mode of thinking based upon the premise of removing hierarchy from society. An anarchist's ideas are in a continual state

of evolution as society changes. As anarchism is against hierarchy, there is no anarchist vanguard that aims to control a future anarchist society — there are merely anarchists who share the goal of creating a new society.

A vision of a new society must include a critique of the current society. Anarchists believe that the social, political and ecological problems that we face are all interconnected. Like the ecologist, anarchists do not believe that any of these problems are solvable in isolation — they must be solved together. Poverty, social marginalisation, pollution, domestic violence and the destruction of forests are all connected. Unlike the proliferation of ‘experts’ who occupy positions of authority within our society, anarchists believe that a piecemeal approach to any of these problems is one which lends itself to failure. The domination of nature by humanity, of nation over region, of women by men, of the rich and powerful over the poor are all entwined in a nexus of domination and hierarchy which restricts our human potential.

Anarchists wish to create a society in which individual liberty and social equality (this is why anarchism is also sometimes called libertarian socialism) are maximised, and where ecological destruction is minimised through the creation of a more equal and less wasteful society. Many people wish they could work less hours, spend more time with their family and friends and live without being fearful of old age. People all over the world wish that they could overcome and reverse the ecologically destructive practices of the state-capitalist alliance. The structure of our current society makes this a difficult achievement. Many of us feel that we are being taken for a ride — bigger roads have not reduced traffic jams, for those lucky enough to have full employment, the average full-time working week remains at five days or somewhere over forty hours, our forests are woodchipped for paper packaging we don’t need and the elderly fear the young. It

is clear that something is wrong with our 'ordered' society. Anarchism suggests holistic solutions to these problems.

The broad-based or holistic concern of anarchism has been such that anarchists have had a considerable concern for ecological or environmental matters. Peter Kropotkin developed a considerable body of thought on anarchism and ecology in the nineteenth century. While 'eco-anarchism' did not develop until the work of Murray Bookchin in the 1950s, anarchism has been concerned with the relationship between place and society. The belief in the need to decentralise society makes it necessary that anarchism considers environmental issues. In recent times Anarchists have been at the forefront of campaigns and movements to reconcile working class communities and environmentalism, as evidenced by Earth First's work with forest workers in the US. All over the world, anarchists have been part of coalitions which have sought to stop roads from destroying peoples homes and environments. In a move to overcome the often antagonistic relationship between working class people and environmentalists, anarcho-syndicalists have proposed that unions develop environmental strategies which seek to hold employers to account and which educate their members about environmental problems.

Many of the ideas of the environmental movement have roots in anarchist thought and practice. More and more people are realising that they cannot trust 'the markets' or government to look after them or their environments. Our 'hyperconsumer' society promotes all sorts of forms of useless consumption in order to keep capitalism expanding. Vast amounts of hours go into looking after the bureaucracy that is necessary in a capitalist economy. As capitalism expands it takes more and more from both the land and the average person, giving the benefits to a select few. For the anarchist, ecological problems will not be able to be solved until all problems of domination, hierarchy and the expansionist nature of capitalism are solved.

currently beset you, humanity, other species and the planet as a whole. Some say anarchists are negative, but our criticism comes out of our concern to create a better world. Many anarchists are involved with projects that seek to put anarchist ideas into practice such as food co-ops, various collectives, tool and book libraries, youth groups and helping out in their community in some way. If environmental problems become more prevalent and harder to solve, anarchism offers a solution which does not involve a turn towards some form of eco-authoritarianism. If you start to put the notion of 'no liberty without equality, no freedom without responsibility' into action, then surely the world will be a better place. Start now.

Unlike some greens, anarchists do not believe that bad environmental practices just happen. Ideas are products of given social relationships. Thus anarchists cannot agree with 'eco-consumerism' which is quite content to leave all the modes of domination intact so long as people buy 'green' products. Changing your buying habits can reduce wastage and promote more environmentally sound practices. However, most environmentally damaging activity occurs in the process of production. Thus it is far better to reject consumerism, and consider what we truly need to enjoy life. Doing so will probably give you more time and money to do things which you consider worthwhile. While ideas and values need to and should be challenged, the social, economic and political structures influencing and binding these ideas must be changed for any lasting and real change to take place. For many people, adopting environmentally sound habits is expensive or difficult, given things such as a lack of public transport, the promotion of non-renewable agriculture and a society structured around waste. This is why anarchists reject the tendency of blaming individuals for environmental problems without considering the social structures that create and encourage environmentally destructive practices. Anarchists argue strongly that there are systemic reasons for the problems that are faced by our society and our planet.

In the meantime, capitalism continues to expand and corporations continue to take a greater part in controlling our lives. We are encouraged to accept the patenting of DNA and the genetic engineering of foodstuffs without question. At the same time, the knowledge of planting and growing things and the ability to meet our own needs is being removed from us at an increasing rate. Anarchists believe that we must reclaim and regain the knowledge of our own immediate world which will allow us to create ecologically viable communities. Patenting of traditional foods and seeds must be totally rejected if we want to retain the ability to provide for ourselves. The central-

isation of power and capital in Australia and throughout the world means that we are removed from the production of our food and that there is a huge amount of time and energy spent on taking goods to the cities. The alienation of city from country is reflective of the alienation of humanity from nature and our alienation from each other. Much ecological, social and political progress could be made by us being able to grow more of our own food in the cities.

Anarchists are not so naive to believe that the old society or cities will disappear overnight — only the weapons of nation-states can cause such destruction. No, anarchists recognise that a number of strategies will have to be taken to ensure that people can choose whether they wish to remain in existing cities or whether they wish to create new forms of dwelling. Community gardens, food co-ops, edible landscapes, increased public transport, reduced working hours and the decentralisation of workplaces, political power and capital will all function to make city living less ecologically destructive and will enrich the lives of the vast majority of our society. Given the decentralisation of power and capital that would be inherent in an anarchist society, many people might find that they no longer have a reason to live in a city. It is highly likely that people would have greater leisure time in an anarchist society, as production would be less wasteful. Some people would work less and some would work harder in an anarchist society, however the vast majority of people would find work less stressful and more meaningful as they saw and reaped directly, the fruits of their labour.

As mentioned before, there is no one vision of an anarchist society. There cannot be such a thing because anarchists recognise that different ecosystems require different societies and that different people will react differently when freed from domination and hierarchy. However, given their concern for equality and liberty, anarchists have consistently focussed on a greater complementarity between humanity and its environ-

ments, the decentralisation of industry, worker control of the workplace, the reskilling of workers and the use of more ecologically sustainable technologies and practices. The creation of workplace and local community assemblies would mean that large-scale marketing and production would become obsolete as would the imperative to produce more and more in the pursuit of profit. Such assemblies would very likely be federated into regional or quasi-national bodies, which would undertake the role of organising things like the management of railways and communications.

Given that there would be no profit-extracting class there would be no need for growth for the sake of growth. Instead the economy and industry would function for the benefit of society and not to the detriment of environmental values. The removal of hierarchy would remove the institutionalised basis for greed. Instead, the decentralisation of decision making and the removal of domination from society would mean that economic and social decision making was made at the point of impact upon a community — within the community itself. A community would not be forced to accept pollution through state bullying or corporate bribery. Anarchist education would encourage cooperation and respect, while seeking to fully develop the potentials of each person. Thus many of the problems of our society, which begin in our schools would be addressed from an early age. A bad education makes it harder to accept the value of freedom, equality and mutuality. Anarchists want the best for all of society, not just a small minority as is currently the case. In the anarchist vision there is no party vanguard who become a new aristocracy, nor is there room for unrestrained corporate activity which would threaten to completely trash our environments.

This article cannot hope to give a truly comprehensive picture of anarchism and ecological issues. However, it hopefully got you thinking about some of the assumptions that we all make about how we are to overcome the many problems that