

The Istanbul Social Ecology Group

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1999

Contents

Our Aims	3
Ecological Crisis and Anarchism	3
Anarchism in Action	4
What Must Be Done	5

This group was founded for creating a new world that takes its roots from the ideas of anarcho-communist movement. As Max Stirner pointed out, “[t]he true man does not lie in the future, an object of longing, but lies, existent and real, in the present.” [The Ego and Its Own, p. 327] And our aim is to convert this human idea to a living reality. From where we are taking our power. As Bakunin wrote: “[a] person is strong only when he stands upon his own truth, when he speaks and acts from his deepest convictions. Then, whatever the situation he may be in, he always knows what he must say and do. He may fall, but he cannot bring shame upon himself or his causes” [Statism and Anarchy – cited in Albert Meltzer, I couldn’t Paint Golden Angels, p. 2].

Our Aims

“Until now all human history has been only a perpetual and bloody immolation of millions of poor human beings in honour of some pitiless abstraction – God, country, power of state, national honour, historical rights, judicial rights, political liberty, public welfare”. For anarchists, the future is already appearing in the present and is expressed by the autonomy of working class self-activity. Anarchy is not some-day-to-be-achieved utopia, it is a living reality whose growth only needs to be freed from constraint. As such anarchist activity is about discovering and aiding emerging trends of mutual aid which work against capitalist domination (i.e. what is actually developing), so the Anarchist “studies society and tries to discover its tendencies, past and present, its growing needs, intellectual and economic, and in his [or her] ideal he merely points out in which direction evolution goes.” [Peter Kropotkin, Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 47] For anarchists, the future is already appearing in the present and is expressed by the autonomy of working class self-activity. Anarchy is not some-day-to-be-achieved utopia, it is a living reality whose growth only needs to be freed from constraint. As such anarchist activity is about discovering and aiding emerging trends of mutual aid which work against capitalist domination (i.e. what is actually developing), so the Anarchist “studies society and tries to discover its tendencies, past and present, its growing needs, intellectual and economic, and in his [or her] ideal he merely points out in which direction evolution goes.” [Peter Kropotkin, Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 47]

Ecological Crisis and Anarchism

An emphasis on anarchist ideas as a solution to the ecological crisis is a common thread in most forms of anarchism today. The trend goes back to the important work done by Peter Kropotkin in arguing that the anarchist society would be based on a confederation of communities that would unite manual and brain work plus industry and agriculture [see Fields, Factories, and Workshops]. This idea of an economy in which “small is beautiful” was proposed nearly 100 years before it was taken up by what was to become the green movement. In addition, in Mutual Aid Kropotkin documented how co-operation within species and between them and their environment is often of more benefit to them than competition. Kropotkin’s work, combined with that of William Morris, the Reclus brothers (both of whom, like Kropotkin, were world-renowned geographers), and many others laid the foundations for the current anarchist interest in ecological issues. The eco-anarchist thread within anarchism has two main focal points: social ecology and “primitivist” anarchism. Social Ecology is associated with the ideas and works of Murray Bookchin,

who has been writing on ecology and anarchism since the 1950's and has been, more than anyone else, the person who has placed ecology at the heart of anarchism. "Primitivist" anarchism is associated with a range of magazines, mostly US-based, like *Fifth Estate*, which emphasise the anti-ecological nature of capitalism and take a frankly anti-civilisation and anti-technology position. They are usually very hostile to social ecology, which they regard as not getting to the root of the problem – namely modern "industrial society" – and think that social ecology's desire to retain certain types of technology will result in "civilisation" growing again to destroy ourselves and the planet. Social Ecology locates the roots of the ecological crisis firmly in relations of domination between people. The domination of nature is seen as a product of domination within society. Therefore social ecologists consider it essential to attack hierarchy, not civilisation as such. In addition, social ecology considers the use of appropriate technology essential in order to liberate humanity and the planet. By being against technology as such, people will spend all their time working, and so hierarchical structures will start to develop again.

Anarchism in Action

Anarchism, more than anything else, is about the efforts of millions of revolutionaries changing the world in the last two centuries. Here we will discuss some of the high points of this movement, all of them of a profoundly anti-capitalist nature. Anarchism is about radically changing the world, not just making the present system less inhuman by encouraging the anarchistic tendencies within it to grow and develop. While no purely anarchist revolution has taken place yet, there have been numerous ones with a highly anarchist character and level of participation. And while these have all been destroyed, in each case it has been at the hands of outside force brought against them (backed either by Communists or Capitalists), not because of any internal problems in anarchism itself. These revolutions, despite their failure to survive in the face of overwhelming force, have been both an inspiration for anarchists and proof that anarchism is a viable social theory and can be practised on a large scale. It is important to point out that these examples are of wide-scale social experiments and do not imply that we ignore the undercurrent of anarchist practice which exists in everyday life, even under capitalism. Both Peter Kropotkin (in *Mutual Aid*) and Colin Ward (in *Anarchy in Action*) have documented the many ways in which ordinary people, usually unaware of anarchism, have worked together as equals to meet their common interests. As Colin Ward argues, "an anarchist society, a society which organises itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state and its bureaucracy, capitalism and its waste, privilege and its injustices, nationalism and its suicidal loyalties, religious differences and their superstitious separatism" [*Anarchy in Action*, p. 14]. Anarchism is not only about a future society, it is also about the social struggle happening today. It is not a condition but a process, which we create by our self-activity and self-liberation. By the 1960's, however, many commentators were writing off the anarchist movement as a thing of the past. Not only had fascism finished off European anarchist movements in the years before and during the war, but in the post-war period these movements were prevented from recovering by the capitalist West on one hand and the Leninist East on the other. Over the same period of time, anarchism had been repressed in the US, Latin America, China, Korea (where a social revolution with anarchist content was put down before the Korean War), and Japan. Even in the one or two countries that escaped the worst of the repression, the combination of the Cold War

and international isolation saw libertarian unions like the Swedish SAC become reformist. But the 60's were a decade of new struggle, and all over the world the 'New Left' looked to anarchism as well as elsewhere for its ideas. Many of the prominent figures of the massive explosion of May 1968 in France considered themselves anarchists. Although these movements themselves degenerated, those coming out of them kept the idea alive and began to construct new movements. The death of Franco in 1976 saw a massive rebirth of anarchism in Spain, with up to 500,000 people attending the CNT's first post-Franco rally. The return to a limited democracy in some South American countries in the late 70's and 80's saw a growth in anarchism there. Finally, in the late 80's it was anarchists who struck the first blows against the Leninist USSR, with the first protest march since 1928 being held in Moscow by anarchists in 1987.

What Must Be Done

The kinds of activity outlined in this section are a general overview of anarchist work. It is by no means exclusive as we are sure to have left something out. However, the key aspect of *real* anarchist activity is direct action — self-activity, self-help, self-liberation and solidarity. Such activity may be done by individuals (for example propaganda work), but usually anarchists emphasis collective activity. This is because most of our problems are of a social nature, meaning that their solutions can only be worked on collectively. Individual solutions to social problems are doomed to failure (for example green consumerism). In addition, collective action gets us used to working together, promoting the experience of self-management and building organisations that will allow us to activity manage our own affairs. Also, and we would like to emphasis this, it's fun to get together with other people and work with them, it's fulfilling and empowering. Anarchists do not ask those in power to give up that power. No, they promote forms of activity and organisation by which all the oppressed can liberate themselves by their own hands. In other words, we do not think that those in power will altruistically give up that power or their privileges. Instead, the oppressed must take the power back into their own hands by their own actions. We must free ourselves, no one else can do it for use. As we have noted before, anarchism is more than just a critique of statism and capitalism or a vision of a freer, better way of life. It is first and foremost a movement, the movement of working class people attempting to change the world. Therefore the kind of activity we discuss in this section the bridge between capitalism and anarchy. By self-activity and direct action, people can change both themselves and their surroundings. They develop within themselves the mental, ethical and spiritual qualities which can make an anarchist society a viable option. As Noam Chomsky argues, "Only through their own struggle for liberation will ordinary people come to comprehend their true nature, suppressed and distorted within institutional structures designed to assure obedience and subordination. Only in this way will people develop more humane ethical standards, 'a new sense of right', 'the consciousness of their strength and their importance as a social factor in the life of their time' and their capacity to realise the strivings of their 'inmost nature.' Such direct engagement in the work of social reconstruction is a prerequisite for coming to perceive this 'inmost nature' and is the indispensable foundations upon which it can flourish" [preface to Rudolf Rocker's *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p. viii]

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