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Why anarchists eventually should get away from the fiction of a liberated society

Jonathan Eibisch

July 2022

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This article was first a post on the blog paradox-a.de. The article was translated with help of deepl.com. If someone wants to revise it linguistically, the original can be found here:

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The call for an anarchist demonstration concludes with the call not to dream of a "liberated society" but to fight for it. For this purpose, "radical politics should be carried into the broad society" and autonomous structures should be organized. Such statements can easily be dismissed as cheap phrasemongering. Well situated bourgeois demonize the radicalism of the corresponding groups, knowing full well that those who advocate such positions by no means have the autonomous power to seriously shake up the distribution of property or political power (actually). Thus, their condemnation of radical leftist phrases ultimately serves to mask the violence with which they have appropriated and maintain their own privileges.

From an anarchist perspective, however, appeals to establish a "liberated society" are to be taken seriously. After all, behind this there is still the idea that "another world is possible" and that it is in the power of a self-organized, struggling movement to realize this against the existing order of domi-

nation. Thus the phrase of the "liberated society" is to be understood as a projection of one's own longings, which as such emerges from the suffering under the domineering conditions of the present. Without this motivation, it is hardly possible to think beyond the existing, i.e. to pursue a social-revolutionary rather than a reformist approach.

But the fictional character of the so-called "liberated society" is obvious. It suggests a final state of redemption, which would come about almost of its own accord after a brilliant final battle. For self-assurance, Marxists who invented and used the theoretical figure of the "liberated society" drew on supposed regularities of historical socio-economic development, which would proceed one-dimensionally according to a teleological understanding of history. Instead of the assertion "no higher being saves us," radical-humanistic (and Eurocentrist) further development of modern mankind was used as metaphysical orientation. Incidentally, this also projected the modern understanding of the world back to the past, which required claiming that previous or non-European forms of society had been fundamentally different. (Yes, they were and are - just not in the construction of their otherness by the global hegemonic elite).

Anarchists assume that the form of society must be socially revolutionized in a long and continuous process on different levels and in various dimensions. A paradox here is on the one hand to want to "change everything" and on the other hand to know that such change per se can only happen processually on different paths and can never be completed. We do not want a somewhat freer society, but one in which social freedom can be realized comprehensively and for all people, in qualitative contrast to the present. And yet we can only fight for it in stages, step by step, building on the successes achieved so far, rather than on the illusion of a great blow from above/outside that will never come. Emancipation means that people become active, empowered, organize themselves and change themselves in their engagement and disputes.

To serve the fiction of a "liberated society" feeds the problems of abstract utopia. In contrast, anarchists stand up for the concretization of utopia with a rather unspectacular understanding of it. It is worth fighting for the real utopia of a libertarian-socialist form of society. In it, freedom, equality, solidarity, self-determination and diversity are to be realized for all people. It means a fundamental transformation of the political form of the state towards a federation of decentralized autonomous communities as well as of the economic form of capitalism towards a decentralized and participatory socialist economy. The libertarian-socialist society has other criteria, which are not at issue here. And anarchy will question them and thus direct them towards the goal of overcoming all relations of domination. Thus the process of the establishment and further development of society as also does not stop "after" the social revolution, but is to be brought forward continuously. For this to succeed, however, the steel-hard framework conditions could be broken up and changed.

None of these aspects is associated with the phrase "the liberated society". It is not used to forge a link between pragmatic and prefigurative thinking, but rather to suspend the apparent contradiction between reform and revolution in the direction of a pseudo-radicalism. The slogan appears in an all the more blatant light, because it is commonly assumed and felt that the existing order of rule is fundamentally dilapidated, while the real-utopian yearning has almost completely dried up. And that even (and/or especially ?) among left-wing radicals. In other words, the phrase "the liberated society" basically serves to deceive oneself about one's own disappointment and to conceal one's own experiences of powerlessness in a verbally radical way.

Moreover, it perpetuates a false understanding of domination. Namely, the one according to which rule would be imposed from outside on the supposedly organic and "good" society. Of course, privileged groups profit from the existing order

of domination and therefore have interests supported by coercion, violence and stultification to maintain it, from which most others suffer. We are dealing with a phenomenon of systemic domination - whose actors are, of course, still vulnerable. If you want to overcome relations of domination as a whole, you have to understand them as such - as social relations - instead of assuming that you can somehow throw out the "stupid", "bad" or "nasty" rulers so that people can then manage their own affairs. It is unfortunately much more complicated and requires at least to admit one's own entanglement in domination (out of which such an ultimate projection for "the liberated society" arises) and to find an adequate way to deal with it.

My position in this context is clear: In my opinion, anarchists should fight for a libertarian-socialist form of society, propagate it, illustrate it, and ally with other currents under this label. It is necessary to create libertarian, equal and solidary institutions and relations in the shell of the old social order. At the same time, anarchists should remain skeptical of any entrenched order and question it, rather than replacing one regime with another - even with the most sincere of concerns. Pursuing both at the same time leads to a paradox that creates the potentially productive tension that I perceive to be the hallmark of anarchism. It is in this approach, I believe, that this is the difference to radical left politics.