

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Basic Principles of Anarchism

Morpheus

Morpheus
Basic Principles of Anarchism
25th June 2003

Retrieved on 2nd August 2020 from https://web.archive.org/web/20070303054259fw_/http://question-everything.mahost.org/Socio-Politics/BasicAnarchy.html

theanarchistlibrary.org

25th June 2003

Contents

Common Myths About Anarchism:	7
Anarchists advocate complete chaos	7
Anarchists believe in mindless violence	7
Anarchists, by definition, are opposed to or- ganization	7
What Anarchism Really Stands For	8
What Anarchists Oppose	10
Hierarchy	10
Capitalism	10
The State	11
Representative “Democracy”	11
“Socialist” States	12
Patriarchy	12
Heterosexism	13
White Supremacy	13
Imperialism	13
Basic Principles of Anarchism	14
Anti-Authoritarianism	14
Free Association	14
Mutual Aid	14
Freedom	14
Self-Management	15
Radical Egalitarianism	15
Feminism	15
What An Anarchist Society Would Look Like	15
Popular Assemblies	16
Councils	16

Decision Making Processes	17
Consensus	18
Direct Democracy	18
Economics	18
Mutualism	19
Collectivism	19
Participatory Economics	19
Gift Economy	20
Primitivism	20
How Might An Anarchist Society Be Created	21
Self-Liberation	21
Direct Action	21
Building the New Society within the Shell of the Old	21
Different Kinds of Anarchists	22
Differences of Focus	22
Evolution vs. Revolution	22
Violence	22
Religion and Philosophy	23
Anarchy In Action	23
Everyday Life	23
Primitivist Societies	24
Ukrainian Revolution	24
Spanish Revolution	25
Common Questions and Objections	26
What Would You Replace The State With?	26
What About Human Nature	26
What Would Happen To Former Politicians and Capitalists?	26
How Could An Anarchist Society Defend Itself From Foreign Aggression and Statist Armies?	27
How Would Anarchists Deal With anti-Social Crimes?	28

act as coordinators. Such coordinators would simply implement the plans developed by the general assembly and would have no authority themselves. In the Ukrainian and Spanish Revolutions when workers took over factories the worker assemblies often created factory committees that performed administrative and coordination tasks. Decision making power stayed with the worker assemblies, the factory committees simply implemented what the workers decided in their assemblies. Coordination between multiple assemblies can be done through the council system.

How Would Anarchists Deal With anti-Social Crimes?

Crime is the result of hierarchy; the abolition of hierarchy will cause it to disappear. 95% of crime is caused by patriarchy, private property and capitalism (stealing, etc.); its abolition will result in the end of 95% of crime. What little is left over could be better dealt with by the community than by any police force. Many historical pre-capitalist societies had little or no crime; a few weeks after the Spanish Revolution began crime plummeted. The state has proven completely incapable of combating crime – it has been trying to prevent crime for years yet has been a complete failure. At best it merely punishes people after the fact. “Prisons fail to improve or reform anyone. Local people aware of each others’ circumstances would be able to apply more suitable solutions, in keeping with the needs of the victim and the offender. The present penal system, on the other hand, _creates_ criminal behaviour. Long term prisoners are often rendered incapable of surviving outside an institution that makes all their decisions for them. How is locking people up with others of an anti-social turn of mind ... supposed to develop responsibility and reasonable behaviour? Of course it does just the opposite. The majority of prisoners re-offend.”⁴ The state and capitalism are far worse than crime; they kill and rob on a scale far greater than any ordinary criminal. Under the present system petty criminals go to prison but the big criminals run the country.

But We Need Coordination and Administration

It is possible to coordinate activities without hierarchy. Any group of people can get together and hold a general assembly where they can divvy up the tasks they need to do and decide who will do what. If needed they can assign one or more people to

⁴ “Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Anarchy” by Anarchist Media Group, Cardiff (UK)

want to participate in the various collective organizations would be free to leave and would be given access to a portion of the means of production so that they could support themselves on their own. During the Spanish Revolution “if you didn’t want to join the collective you were given some land but only as much as you could work yourself. You were not allowed to employ” wage-laborers.”³ They could attempt to set up alternative systems so long as they are completely voluntary. They could attempt to reestablish capitalism (or some other form of oppression) so long as it was completely non-violent and voluntary but doing so would be extremely difficult because few people would volunteer to be poor and work in their sweatshops. Few people will volunteer to be oppressed, especially in an anarchist society where hierarchy would be viewed quite negatively. Reestablishing some form of domination through purely voluntary and non-violent means would therefore be almost impossible.

How Could An Anarchist Society Defend Itself From Foreign Aggression and Statist Armies?

The same tactics used to overthrow hierarchy, direct action, could be used against counter-revolutionary armies. This includes, but is not limited to, civil disobedience, strikes, insurrections, street fighting, etc. If necessary the population could be armed and a decentralized network of democratic militias formed to wage guerilla warfare against the statist forces. This can be done against both foreign invaders (if one part of the world is in anarchy and the other is authoritarian) and against domestic counter-revolutionaries who attempt to use violence to force everyone back into an authoritarian society.

³ “The Spanish Civil War: Anarchism In Action” by Eddie Conlon, Chapter 2

but also strategic errors made by the anarcho-syndicalists and backstabbing by Marxist and Republican “allies” in the fight against fascism.

Common Questions and Objections

What Would You Replace The State With?

Nothing. Would you replace a tumor?

What About Human Nature

If human nature is bad then hierarchy should be abolished because those on the top will inevitably abuse their power. If human nature is good then there is no need for hierarchy because people will do good things without being dominated by others. Either way, we should have anarchy. If people are too evil to rule themselves then they are far too evil to rule other people. The immense majority of human history has been lived in hunter-gatherer societies, a form of primitivist anarchy. If human nature favors any particular social system it favors hunter-gatherer anarchy because that is what the majority of human history has been lived in. Given the immense diversity of social systems humans have created over the eons it is unlikely that human nature, if it even exists, plays a great role in determining social structure.

What Would Happen To Former Politicians and Capitalists?

Individual politicians and members of the capitalist class from the old society would be allowed to become part of the new society as equals. They would lose all their former powers and privileges and live alongside everyone else as equals. Those who do not want to are free to become hermits or leave. Anyone who does not

Common Myths About Anarchism:

Anarchists advocate complete chaos

This is a complete myth with no basis in reality. Anarchists do not advocate chaos and anarchy does not mean chaos. Similar slander used to be said about the ideas of democracy and republics. In places where a Monarchy was thought necessary the idea of elected governments was often equated with complete chaos. This association is the result of slander by the powerful (the state, corporations, etc.) that control the media and is, unfortunately, not a surprise. Since anarchists seek to overthrow them it is not surprising that they would slander anarchism with all sorts of absurd nonsense.

Anarchists believe in mindless violence

Another common stereotype is that of the mad bomb-throwing anarchist who advocates carnage and destruction for the sake of it. This too is a myth. Anarchists do not normally go around throwing bombs at everyone nor do we consider beating up old ladies a virtue. It is true that there have been anarchists who have used violence to advance their cause but this is true of every political philosophy. Republicans and democrats have used much more violence throughout history than anarchists, yet they are never demonized as crazed bomb throwers. Indeed, the state is not only inherently violent but the most violent organization in human history. It uses violence on a systemic level (in the form of police & militaries) and is responsible for numerous genocides. The state is vastly more violent than the most violent of anarchists.

Anarchists, by definition, are opposed to organization

The vast majority of anarchists are not opposed to organization. What anarchists are opposed to is hierarchical organization — organizations in which one group of people tells the other members

what to do. Instead anarchists advocate organization without authority, where all members have an equal say in group decisions.

What Anarchism Really Stands For

Anarchy comes from the Greek and literally means “no rulers.” Anarchists are anti-authoritarians who seek to abolish domination. It is important to differentiate between different two types of authority: legitimate (or rational) authority and illegitimate (or irrational) authority. In other words, there’s a difference between being an authority and having authority. Being an authority means that a person is recognized as competent for any particular task based on her or his knowledge and individual skills. It is socially acknowledged expertise. Legitimate authorities are experts who are particularly knowledgeable, skillful or wise in any particular area. It may be in our best interests to follow their recommendations, but they have no power to force us to do so, nor should they. Legitimate authority is this kind of authority, the authority of an expert.

Having authority is a social relationship based on status and power derived from a hierarchical position within a group. It means dividing society/the group into the order givers and the order takers. The order givers, the authorities, tell the order takers what to do and they must obey. This is illegitimate authority. A boss, for example, is an illegitimate authority because employees must obey his orders. When something is described as “authoritarian” it usually means that it uses illegitimate authority.

Hierarchy is essentially institutionalized authority. It is a pyramidally structured organization consisting of a series of grades, ranks or offices of increasing power, prestige, and/or remuneration. Those with lower ranks must obey those with higher ranks. Hierarchies maintain control by coercion — the threat of negative sanctions (physical, economic, social, etc.) against those who don’t obey. Hierarchical organizations are, by definition, organizations

though it included cities at its height. Village assemblies and communes were formed throughout much of the Ukraine. When it included cities factories were taken over by the workers. They formed decentralized democratic militias, which fought guerilla warfare against numerous statist armies that invaded the Ukraine during this time period. The Anarcho-Communist Nestor Makhno played a major role in organizing these militias. They successfully defeated the Germans, Austrians, Ukrainian Nationalists, and two white invasions led by General Denikin and then General Wrangel (the Whites were ultra-reactionary armies fighting the Bolsheviks in Russia). In 1921 the Bolsheviks, having recently won the civil war against the Whites, invaded the Ukraine. They used their vastly superior resources to conquer the Ukraine and implement a reign of terror.

Spanish Revolution

On July 19, 1936 General Francisco Franco launched a Fascist coup against the Spanish Republic. In response the CNT, an anarcho-syndicalist union, and the UGT, a union affiliation with the Spanish Socialist Party, called a general strike. The Republic refused to release arms to the workers so they broke into the barracks and distributed arms to the people. They fought and defeated the Fascist coup in two-thirds of Spain. The state was effectively destroyed; the military was in rebellion and the police forces had dissolved during the fighting. The workers and peasants proceeded to take over the land and factories. Collectives were formed throughout anti-fascist Spain. Collectivism was the main economic system, although a few villages abolished money and implemented anarcho-communism. There were also elements of mutualism implemented in some places. Decentralized militias were formed to fight against the Fascists. After three years of civil war the fascists won. The victory of fascism was due not only to their superior arms and assistance from Hitler & Mussolini

without fear of persecution by the rest of the group.”² Similar non-hierarchical forms of organization happen all the time even in the most authoritarian of societies. They’re informal and small scale but it is an example of anarchy in action. In an anarchist society non-hierarchical forms of organization would be the dominant form of organization.

Primitivist Societies

There have been many examples of anarchist societies throughout history; most of them have been agrarian or hunter-gatherer societies. The immense majority of human history was lived in primitive anarchy. The human race has been around between 50,000 and 500,000 years (depending on how you define human and what estimates you use). The first states came around about 7,000 years ago in Mesopotamia. For a long time after states and classes were created they were limited to certain parts of the world while much of the globe lived in anarchy. It is only in the last couple of centuries that states came to rule the entire world, primarily as a result of conquest. Although far from perfect, most primitivist societies were not the Hobbesian hellholes they are often portrayed as (see *Stone Age Economics* by Marshall Sahlins). Well known indigenous anarcho-primitivist societies include the !Kung and the Igbo (prior to western imperialism).

Ukrainian Revolution

In early 1918 the new Bolshevik government of Russia made peace with Germany and agreed to give up the Ukraine, formerly part of the Russian Empire, to Germany. The inhabitants of the Ukraine had little say in this and were opposed to it. A rebellion against German rule erupted which turned into an anarchist revolution. The revolution was rooted primarily among peasants al-

² “Consent or Coercion” by Affinity Group of Evolutionary Anarchists

that are run by elites. Those on the top, the elite, have more power than those on the bottom. Hierarchical authority is the authority that is inherent in any hierarchy. This is the same thing as illegitimate (or irrational) authority — that is, relations of command and obedience. Another name for this is domination.

Anarchism is extreme skepticism of authority. The basic idea is to abolish domination in favor of a society based on voluntary cooperation. As the anarchist Noam Chomsky said:

“I think it only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom. That includes political power, ownership and management, relations among men and women, parents and children, our control over the fate of future generations (the basic moral imperative behind the environmental movement, in my view), and much else. Naturally this means a challenge to the huge institutions of coercion and control: the state, the unaccountable private tyrannies that control most of the domestic and international economy, and so on. But not only these. That is what I have always understood to be the essence of anarchism: the conviction that the burden of proof has to be placed on authority, and that it should be dismantled if that burden cannot be met. Sometimes the burden can be met. If I’m taking a walk with my grandchildren and they dart out into a busy street, I will use not only authority but also physical coercion to stop them. The act should be challenged, but I think it can readily meet the challenge. And there are other cases; life is a complex affair, we understand very little about

humans and society, and grand pronouncements are generally more a source of harm than of benefit. But the perspective is a valid one, I think, and can lead us quite a long way.”¹

Following Chomsky’s logic, anarchists argue that hierarchy, bodies of people having authority over others, is unjustified and should be abolished. Some anarchists take this a step further and oppose other forms of authority; a few argue that “legitimate authority” (expertise) is also unjustified, but most do not. Unless a good justification can be given for any form of authority it should be abolished. In the case of hierarchical authority anarchist believe there is no valid justification for it; all major hierarchical institutions should be abolished. Instead of dividing society into a hierarchy of order givers and order takers everyone should have control over their own life and an equal say in group decisions.

What Anarchists Oppose

Hierarchy

As explained above, anarchists are opposed to domination. Relations of command and obedience are not only unnecessary but also inherently detrimental to humanity. Everyone should have control of their own life instead of being bossed around by others.

Capitalism

Capitalism is an economic system based upon wage labor. Under capitalism a small group of people, the capitalist class, owns the means of production (land, factories, mines, etc.) and the working class (the majority of the population) must sell their labor to the

¹ “Chomsky on Anarchism, Marxism and Hope for the Future” Interview in Red & Black Magazine 1995

The majority of anarchists are not pacifists, however. Although non-pacifist anarchists do not glorify violence most believe that the use of violence in self-defense and/or to overthrow hierarchy is justified.

Religion and Philosophy

Anarchists come from many different religions and philosophical backgrounds — from atheistic materialism to postmodernism to egoism to Taoism to Christianity and everything in between. Although most anarchists are atheists/agnostics there are religious anarchists including Pagans, Christians, Muslims and Jews. Any religion or philosophy is theoretically compatible with anarchism so long as it does not advocate things (such as a god-king) that contradict the basic ideas above.

Anarchy In Action

Everyday Life

There are many examples of anarchist principles in real life. Some of them come from the daily lives of ordinary people living in contemporary hierarchical societies. One example is “a group of friends going on a camping trip. They plan their trip, and each person brings useful skills and tools to share. They work together to set up tents, fish, cook, clean up, with no one in a position of authority over anyone else. The group organizes itself, chores are done, and everyone passes the time as they please, alone or in groups with others. People discuss their concerns and possible solutions are proposed. No one is bound to go along with the group, but choosing to spend time together implies a willingness to at least try to work out constructive solutions to the problems and frictions that will inevitably arise. If no resolution is possible, the dissenting individuals can form another grouping or leave

like. These non-hierarchical organizations would fight against the institutions of the old society (government, capitalism, patriarchy, etc.) and as the old society is destroyed they take over the running of society.

Different Kinds of Anarchists

Differences of Focus

In addition to differences over what an anarchist society should look like, different anarchists also focus more on different issues. Anarcha-Feminists focus on women's liberation and the struggle against patriarchy. Eco-Anarchists focus on ecology and the destruction of the environment. Anarcho-syndicalists focus on unions and the labor movement. The divisions between the various kinds of anarchists overlap and are not absolute. Most different kinds of anarchists are willing to co-exist and work together.

Evolution vs. Revolution

The majority of anarchists are revolutionaries who believe that an anarchist society will come about as the result of a social revolution. The government would be overthrown and abolished, the means of production expropriated and placed under self-management and a rapid transition to anarchy made. Others believe in an evolutionary approach — that anarchy will come about as a result of a lengthy centuries-long evolution.

Violence

Some anarchists are also pacifists who believe all forms of violence are immoral. True pacifism logically implies anarchism. The state is inherently violent and the most violent organization in human history; other forms of hierarchy are usually violent as well.

capitalist class in order to survive. If the workers do not sell their labor they will starve because they do not have access to the means of production — the capitalist class monopolizes them. The ownership of the means of production by the capitalists does not have to be direct but can be through an organization they control, such as corporations. Anarchists are also opposed to all other class systems but focus on capitalism because it is the dominant economic system today. Class is economic hierarchy. Other class systems include feudalism, soviet-style “socialism” (which many anarchists consider to be a form of state-capitalism) and slavery.

The State

Sociologists define the state (also called government) as an organization with a monopoly (or near monopoly) on the legitimate use of violence. It is a centralized rule making body with a pyramidal, hierarchical structure that uses its monopoly of force to boss around all those within its territory. It maintains various armed bodies of people (police, military) and coercive institutions (courts, prisons) with which it coerces the population into obeying its dictates. Because of its hierarchical structure and monopoly of force the state always acts to enforce the rule of a small elite. It exists not to “enforce order” or anything like that but to enforce the will of the ruling class. Anarchists are opposed to all states, including:

Representative “Democracy”

Elected governments are run by and for a small elite, just like all other states. Elected representatives are not tied in any substantial way to particular policies, regardless of the preferences of the electorate. Ordinary people have no real control over the decisions of the politicians — once elected they can make what ever decisions they want regardless of what most people want. Representatives are separated from the population but exposed to powerful pres-

sure groups including state bureaucracies, corporations, lobbyists and political party power brokers.

“Socialist” States

Attempts to overthrow the capitalist class and implement a socialist “workers’ state” inevitably lead to the replacement of the old ruling class with a new, bureaucratic ruling class that exploits the working class just as the old ruling class did. There is no effective way for the working class as a whole to control the state. It has a monopoly of force and will simply use that monopoly to establish itself as a new ruling class. Decision making power lies with the leaders, not with the masses of ordinary workers. When the politburo or parliament or council of people’s commissars or other leaders are making the decisions the workers are not.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is male domination — a social relation in which men have power over women; gender hierarchy. In every society men and women are expected to behave in certain ways and if they do not they are subjected to various forms of coercion ranging from being made fun of to violence to exile. How a man or woman is expected to behave in a given society is called their gender. This is different from sex, which refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish male from female. Gender varies greatly from society to society. Under patriarchy gender is constructed so that, on average, men have more power than women. The results of this are quite negative — in addition to diminishing women’s freedom it also results in sexual harassment, reduced opportunities for women, rape and various other forms of sexual violence. Anarchists advocate equality of the sexes.

How Might An Anarchist Society Be Created

Self-Liberation

Anarchists believe in self-liberation. The liberation of the oppressed can only come about through the actions of the oppressed themselves (either individually or collectively). Those on the bottom of society have to rebel against those on the top and refuse to obey them. People cannot be forced to be free. Anarchy cannot be created by some vanguard seizing power but only by the self-liberation of the oppressed.

Direct Action

Direct action means that instead of relying on someone else to act for you (such as a politician) act for yourself. It is any action which people themselves decide upon and organize themselves that is based on their own collective strength and does not rely on getting intermediaries to act for them. Examples of direct action include strikes, boycotts, sabotage, insurrections and civil disobedience. Direct action can also be liberatory because it puts power in the hands of ordinary people; instead of relying on someone else to do something we do it ourselves.

Building the New Society within the Shell of the Old

The means you use will greatly affect the ends you get. As such anarchists organize along the same principles in which we advocate organizing society: non-hierarchically. For this reason anarchist organizations are often based around general assemblies and spokescouncils. Many anarchists see the initial framework of anarchy being created within the old society, before capitalism and the state are abolished. Popular organs of self-management would be formed before the overthrow of the old society. This includes neighborhood assemblies, workers’ councils, syndicalist unions and the

Balanced job complexes share quality of work and empowering work equitably throughout the workplace and the entire economy. Workers are remunerated for effort and sacrifice, so in tandem with balanced job complexes consumption bundles are roughly equal, with minor discrepancies due to people's chosen working hours and intensity.

Gift Economy

Also called anarcho-communism or libertarian communism. A gift economy would abolish money and trading all together. Production and distribution would be done purely on the basis of need through a confederation of free communes. The economy would be organized along the lines of "from each according to ability, to each according to need." The "communism" in anarcho-communism has nothing to do with the countries which some erroneously call "Communist" (USSR, China, etc.). None of those countries actually claimed to be communist; they claimed to be in a transition to communism. Anarcho-communists opposed these dictatorships from the very beginning and have participated in many rebellions against them. Anarcho-communists would do away with money, central planning and the state — all of which were present in the USSR, China, etc.

Primitivism

Primitivists would abolish industry, civilization and most forms of technology. Instead anarcho-primitivists advocate a low-tech green society. This would be either an agrarian or hunter-gatherer society. Primitivists are split on the question of agriculture: some want to do away with it all together and others would keep some forms of primitive agriculture.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is a natural outcome of the form of patriarchy that exists in the west and many other parts of the world. Gender in most modern patriarchal societies is constructed so that heterosexual behavior is the norm. Homosexuals deviate from how men and women are expected to behave and so are subjected to various forms of coercion as a result. There is thus a hierarchy between hetero and homosexuals. Anarchists are opposed to any sort of oppression on the basis of one's sexuality.

White Supremacy

Race is a social construction. It divides a population into a hierarchical set of "races" with those on top — the white race — having privileges and power over those in other "lower" races. Race is hereditary. Usually people are assigned to their race based on some meaningless characteristic, such as skin color. Race is not at all biological but is a pure social construction. Looking at different societies that have different constructions of race easily proves this. What Americans call blacks are actually broken into several different races in most Latin American countries (blacks, mulattos, etc). In the US Irish, Italians and East Europeans were considered non-white a hundred years ago but today are considered whites. In Rwanda two groups most Americans would consider black, Hutus and Tutsis, are regarded as two different races. White supremacy first arose with the Atlantic Slave Trade as a way of justifying it and of splitting the working class to insure that poor whites did not ally with rebellious blacks.

Imperialism

Imperialism is a social relationship in which the rulers of one country dominate the population of another country or territory.

At present the United States is the main imperialist nation, dominating most other countries in the world. Past imperialist powers have included the Soviet Union, Rome, Germany, England and the Aztecs.

Basic Principles of Anarchism

Anti-Authoritarianism

Anarchists are extremely skeptical about the need for any kind of authority. At minimum all anarchists believe that hierarchy should be abolished and some take this further and oppose other forms of authority. Instead of hierarchy, everyone should have control over their own life and an equal say in group decisions.

Free Association

Everyone should be allowed to associate freely with those they choose and to disassociate themselves when they choose. Individuals should not be forced into social relations against their will. Society should be based upon free agreement, rather than coercion.

Mutual Aid

Instead of attempting to dominate each other social relations should be based on solidarity and voluntary cooperation. When individuals come together to help each other they can accomplish more than when they work against each other.

Freedom

Freedom means the ability to control one's own life instead of being controlled by others, as is the case with hierarchy. This is sometimes called liberty or autonomy. Controlling other people's lives is not freedom but a restriction of freedom.

Mutualism

In mutualism people would be either self-employed or part of a worker-controlled cooperative (individual cooperatives would be run by worker assemblies as described above). They would produce goods and trade them on a market. Although mutualism uses markets to coordinate production it is not capitalist because wage labor would be abolished. No one would sell their labor to others but would instead work in cooperatives or for themselves.

Collectivism

In Collectivism markets would be abolished. Instead of using markets to coordinate production they would set up workers councils, as described above, to coordinate production. Each workplace would be run by its own worker assembly and each assembly would federate with other workplace assemblies in the area, forming a local workers council. The workers councils would federate with each other (forming more councils) as needed on many levels. Money would be kept and people paid on the basis of how much they work. Most collectivists believe that collectivism would eventually evolve into a gift economy.

Participatory Economics

Also called Parecon. This is similar to collectivism; the biggest difference is that there are consumer assemblies in addition to worker assemblies. The underlying values parecon seeks to implement are equity, solidarity, diversity, and participatory self management. The main institutions to attain these ends are council self management, balanced job complexes, remuneration according to effort and sacrifice, and participatory planning. Consumers and workers directly democratically and cooperatively negotiate their production and consumption on an individual basis and via worker and consumer councils and federations of councils.

Consensus

In consensus everyone in the group must agree to a decision before it can be put into action. All contributions are valued and participation is encouraged. Any member can block consensus, stopping a decision they strongly object to. Members may also “stand aside,” allowing a decision they do not like to be made without blocking or supporting it.

Direct Democracy

Decisions would be made by directly voting on the options — the option with a majority of votes is implemented. Anarchists who advocate direct democracy do not believe in a mechanical process whereby the majority just votes away the minority and ignores them. It is intended to be a dynamic discussion process where different people listen to each other and exchange ideas. Direct Democracy is combined with free association as well — meaning that anyone who is out-voted does not absolutely have to abide by the decision. They can simply leave the group.

These decision making processes would be used in the popular assemblies, councils, etc. There are many variations on them and it is also possible to synthesize consensus and direct democracy. Some groups could use direct democracy but require the majority be of a certain size (such as 2/3rds or 3/4ths) instead of a simple majority. Another variation is to attempt to achieve the largest majority possible.

Economics

There have been many different economic systems envisioned by anarchists. These different visions are not necessarily incompatible with each other and could probably co-exist within the same society. The main ones are:

Self-Management

In groups decisions should be made in a manner so that everyone has an equal say. People should govern themselves, rather than dividing people into some who give orders and some who obey as in hierarchical organizations.

Radical Egalitarianism

Anarchists believe in an egalitarian society. This does not mean some totalitarian society where everyone is identical or lives identical lives. It does not mean denying individual diversity or uniqueness. Rather anarchists believe in equality of both wealth and power — a natural consequence of the abolition of hierarchy.

Feminism

Anarchists favor social, economic and political equality for men and women. The domination of men over women should be abolished and all people given control of their own lives.

What An Anarchist Society Would Look Like

There have been many different visions of what an anarchist society would look like. Any vision that abolishes the things anarchists are opposed to and is consistent with the earlier stated principles of anarchism is compatible with anarchy. There are, however, many institutions that have been proposed by anarchists to run a non-hierarchical society. Most of these are not based on idle speculation but by looking at how actually existing anarchist societies have worked. Some of them are:

Popular Assemblies

Also called general assemblies or mass assemblies. In any organization people can come together to meet and discuss whatever common problems or activities they face. At these assemblies everyone should have an equal opportunity to participate in both the discussion/debate and the final decisions. These can be formed in workplaces where they would take over the running of all workplaces. Worker assemblies would then meet regularly to plan production, divvy up the tasks that need to be accomplished, etc. They can be formed in each neighborhood in order to deal with whatever particular issues confront that neighborhood and organize to deal with them. These are based on free association so whenever a group of people wants to get together to accomplish some goal they can simply form a general assembly to organize it. Free association also means that no one would have to participate in an assembly if they did not want to. Such assemblies can be formed to organize around anything — not only around workplace and neighborhood issues but potentially also universities, clubs, space exploration, etc. Worker assemblies, neighborhood assemblies, university assemblies, community assemblies and the like can all be formed to run society without hierarchy, based on self-management.

Councils

The different assemblies can coordinate their activities through the use of a council system. This is done by each assembly assigning a contact person(s) (sometimes called a spoke or delegate) to meet with other contact people from other assemblies which they want to coordinate things with. The meeting of contact people is called a council or spokescouncil. Position of contact person should rotate frequently. Each contact person is mandated, meaning that they are instructed by the assembly that they come from on how to deal with any issue. The contact people would be given binding instruc-

tions, committing them to a framework of policies, developed by their assembly, within which they would have to act. If at any time they violate their mandate their assembly would instantly recall them and their decisions revoked. Decision making power stays in the assemblies; contact people simply convey and implement those positions. Contact people do not have any authority or special privileges. Councils are organized from the bottom up, with control staying in the assemblies. They are not hierarchical organizations but simply coordinate the activities of the assemblies without authority. Instead of hierarchy there are decentralized confederations and networks. This differs from representative institutions in that decision making power stays in the assemblies whereas representatives can make whatever decisions they want and have authority over others. These councils can be formed to coordinate the activities of assemblies on whatever level needed. Worker councils can coordinate the activities of the worker assemblies; neighborhood councils can coordinate the activities of different neighborhood assemblies, etc. They can also do this on a regional scale — forming regional worker councils, etc — and those regional confederations can use the same method to coordinate with each other. In all cases decision making power stays with the assemblies upon which the councils are based — the assemblies would be the core of any organization.

Decision Making Processes

Any decision making process in which everyone has control over their own life and all members have an equal say, rather than dividing people into order givers and order takers, is theoretically compatible with anarchism. Although there are many different ways in which this can be done, there are two main methods of non-hierarchical decision making which are advocated by most anarchists: