

What Is Anarchism?

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At the beginning of each issue of The Transmetropolitan Review we have provided a brief explanation of what anarchism is. Too long have our detractors, infiltrators, the media, the police, and rich kids have been the ones explaining what anarchism is to the public. In each issue, we have aimed to keep our definitions simple, to combine the words of anarchists throughout time and synthesize their thoughts into something short and easy to understand. This is an unending effort, and anarchist pedagogy is notoriously slow. But our goal remains to spread anarchism, and so we present you with the first three definitions of anarchism, originally released in the fall-winter of 2015-2016 in the Seattle region. Around 700 issues of each paper were printed, and each issue has received around 1000 views on this website. We encourage other anarchists to engage in similar projects in their respective regions. At this moment of electoral narcosis and confusion, we must remind people of the beautiful idea and what it can offer to this bruised and battered world.

#1

We will tell it to you in plain words, through the voices of anarchists written or spoken throughout time. Anarchism is not a new idea. It is very old. By definition, an anarchist is a person who does not wish to be oppressed nor wish to be an oppressor, a person who wishes the greatest well-being, freedom, and knowledge for all human beings.

A person who is satisfied to live among slaves and draw profit from the labor of slaves is not and cannot be an anarchist. To be an anarchist it is not enough to recognize that anarchism is a beautiful idea—in theory even capitalists and police might agree with it—but one must want to struggle to achieve anarchism, or at least to approximate it, by reducing the power of capitalism over our lives and the lives of all others. Until all are free, none are free.

The aspiration towards total freedom, if not tempered by a love for life and by the desire that all should enjoy equal freedom, may well create rebels who soon become exploiters and tyrants, but never anarchists. One can be a willing slave for a variety of reasons, just as one can be a tyrant if not met with adequate resistance.

Government is the negation of freedom and it is not possible to be free without being rid of it. The freedom to oppress, to tax, to exploit, to evict, and to kill is the denial of freedom and hence no freedom at all. The fact that our enemies make hypocritical use of the word freedom is not enough to make us deny the principle of freedom in our own lives.

The slave is always in a position of legitimate self defense. Their violence against the oppressor, the capitalist, or the tyrant is always justifiable. This conflict may be open or latent, but it always exists.

When the people meekly submit to the law, or their protests are feeble and confined to words, the government ignores the people. When the protests are lively, insistent, threatening, the government gives way or resorts to repression. But one always comes back to insurrection. For if the government does not give way and resorts to repression, the people will rebel again and again. If the government does give way, then the people gain confidence in themselves and make greater and greater demands until the incompatibility between freedom and authority becomes clear. In either case, insurrection is the result. Whether we win or not depends on how great the desire for freedom is. If it is shared by enough people, millions or billions, we can win.

But what does it mean to win? To create an anarchist world? We must say there can be no “anarchist world.” There can only be anarchy. It is the natural state of most humans and for all the natural world. Most humans tend to get along, share when able, and respect each others differences. Bu there is a minority of humans who have not only enslaved most other humans, they have destroyed massive amounts of life and are threatening to destroy the planet. To create anarchy is to destroy the power of this small minority and let tens of thousands of small words blossom in its place. We have suffered under one God, one King, and one Capitalism for far too long. It is time for the many to rule the world once again, as they should. And when that world arrives we will still be anarchists among the many, trying our best to live anarchism.

To destroy a persons ability to live off the land is to take nearly all of their freedom away. They can exercise their freedom to steal, and they will be justified in doing so, but without land the only other option is to submit to the reign of capitalism and exchange ones life for a dollar. They have poisoned the land, forced us to work for them, and deserve to be overthrown immediately. We must all live on this planet, this same earth we all were born on. To destroy another persons land is to destroy them. To destroy the planet is to destroy everything it has ever created. We must all organize to stop this destruction now.

We will have more plain words in the future. For now, just know that the stakes are life or death. Without victory, we face only extinction. History vindicates anarchism thrice over. The time of our revolution is yesterday, today, and tomorrow. LONG LIVE ANARCHY!

#2

There are periods in the life of human society when revolution becomes an imperative necessity, when it proclaims itself as inevitable. New ideas germinate everywhere, seeking to force their way into the light, to find an application in life; everywhere they are opposed by the inertia of those whose interest it is to maintain the old order; they suffocate in the stifling atmosphere of prejudice and traditions. Political, economic, and social institutions are crumbling; the social structure, having become uninhabitable, is hindering, even preventing the development of the seeds which are being propagated within its damaged walls and being brought forth around them.

The need for a new life becomes apparent. The code of established morality, that which governs the greater number of people in their daily life, no longer seems sufficient. What formerly seemed just is now felt to be a crying injustice. The morality of yesterday is today recognized as revolting immorality. The conflict between new ideas and old traditions flames up in every class of society, in every possible environment, in the very bosom of the family.

Daily, the popular conscience rises up against the scandals which breed amidst the privileged and the leisured, against the crimes committed in the name of the law of the stronger, or in order to maintain these privileges. Those who long for the triumph of justice, those who would put new ideas into practice, are soon forced to recognize that the realization of their generous, humanitarian and regenerating ideas cannot take place in a society thus constituted; they perceive the necessity of a revolutionary whirlwind which will sweep away all this rottenness, revive sluggish hearts with its breath, and bring to humankind that spirit of devotion, self-denial, and heroism, without which society sinks through degradation and vileness into complete disintegration.

In periods of frenzied haste toward wealth, of feverish speculation and of crisis, of the sudden downfall of great industries and the ephemeral expansion of other branches of production, of scandalous fortunes amassed in a few years and dissipated as quickly, it becomes evident that the economic institutions which control production and exchange are far from giving to society the prosperity which they are supposed to guarantee; they produce precisely the opposite result. Instead of order they bring forth chaos; instead of prosperity, poverty and insecurity; instead of reconciled interests, war; a perpetual war of the exploiter against the worker, of exploiters and of workers among themselves.

Human society is seen to be splitting more and more into two hostile camps, and at the same time to be subdividing into thousands of small groups waging merciless war against each other. Weary of these wars, weary of the miseries which they cause, society rushes to seek a new organization; it clamors loudly for a complete remodeling of the system of property ownership, of production, of exchange and all economic relations which spring from it.

The machinery of government, entrusted with the maintenance of the existing order, continues to function, but at every turn of its deteriorated gears it slips and stops. Its working becomes more and more difficult, and the dissatisfaction caused by its defects grows continuously. Every day gives rise to a new demand. Attacked from all sides they defend themselves awkwardly, they evade, they commit blunder upon blunder, and they soon succeed in cutting the last rope of salvation; they drown the prestige of the government in ridicule, caused by their own incapacity. Such periods demand revolution. It becomes a social necessity; the situation itself is revolutionary.

We do not fight to put ourselves in the place of the exploiters and oppressors of today, and do not struggle for the triumph of an abstraction. We want good fortune for individuals, for everyone, without exception. We desire that each human being be able to develop themselves and live as happily as possible. Everything that seeks to destroy economic and political oppression, all that serves to raise the moral and intellectual level of human beings, all that provokes hatred against oppression and love between people, brings us closer to our aim and as a consequence is good. We desire the triumph of liberty and love. But do we renounce for that the use of violent means? Not in the least. Our means are those that circumstances allow us and impose on us. Certainly we don't want to harm a hair on anyone's head; we would like to dry all the tears and not to make any more be shed. But we must struggle in the world such as it is, or else remain sterile dreamers.

If you feel you are an anarchist, it is easy to join the struggle. Find your friends and firmly decide to leave this economy of debt and misery. Form an ANARCHIST FEDERATION. Collectively save your money and purchase land, housing, whatever can help you work less, toil less, and have more time to live freely and help others. If you want to forgo money entirely, simply occupy the land or the housing you want and refuse to leave. An anarchist federation shares with itself and grows member by member, eventually hooking up with the other federations until the capitalist economy is gone.

But if you have had enough, if you want to strike at capitalism and the state, form an ANARCHIST DIRECT ACTION GROUP. Find your most trusted friends, people who you know are not cops, people you have known since childhood. Pick a target to destroy or render inoperable, like a bank or corporate office, for example. Make your plans, carry out your action, and be sure not to harm anyone. With the anarchist federation and the anarchist direct action group,

#3

Organization which is, after all, only the practice of cooperation and solidarity, is a natural and necessary condition of social life. It is an inescapable fact which forces itself on everybody, as much on human society in general as on any group of people who are working towards a common objective. The age long oppression of the masses by a small privileged group has always been the result of the inability of most workers to agree among themselves to organize with others for production, for enjoyment, and for the possible needs of defence against whoever might wish to exploit and oppress them. Anarchism exists to remedy this state of affairs, to trigger this organization.

When a community has needs and its members do not know how to organize spontaneously to provide them, someone comes forward, an authority who satisfies those needs by utilising the services of all and directing them to his liking. If the city streets are unsafe and the people do not know what measures to take, a police force emerges that expects to be supported and paid by the community, as well as imposing itself on them and throwing its weight around. If some item is needed, and the community does not know how to arrange with the distant producers to supply it in exchange for their locally produced goods, the merchant will appear who will profit by wedging himself between the producer and consumer. This is what has happened in our midst; the less organized we have become, the more prone we are to imposed on by a few individuals. And this is understandable...

So much so that organization, far from creating authority, is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each one of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of rulers.

An anarchist organization must, in my opinion, allow for complete autonomy, independence, and therefore full responsibility, to individuals and groups. Free agreement between those who think it useful to come together for cooperative actions. A moral duty to fulfill ones pledges and to take no action which is contrary to any agreements. On such bases one then introduces practical forms and the suitable instruments to give real life to the organization. Thus the groups, the federation of groups, the federations of federations, meetings, assemblies, farms, coops, etc. But this all must be done freely, in such a way as to not restrict the thought and initiative of individual members, but only to give greater scope to the efforts which, in isolation, would be impossible or ineffective.

We would certainly be happy if we could all get along well together and unite all the forces of anarchism in a strong movement; but we do not believe in the solidity of organization which are built up on concessions and assumptions and in which there is no real agreement and sympathy between members. Better disunited than badly united. But we would wish that each individual joined their friends and that there should be no isolated forces, or lost forces.

The fundamental error of the reformists is that of dreaming of solidarity, a sincere collaboration, between masters and servants, between proprietors and workers. Those who envisage a society of well stuffed pigs which waddle contentedly under the thumb of a small number of swineherd; who do not take into account the need for freedom and human dignity; who believe in a God or a Market that orders the poor to be submissive and the rich to be good and charitable—are gravely mistaken. A social peace based on abundance for all will remain a dream so long as society is divided into antagonistic classes, that is the employers and the employees.

The antagonism is spiritual rather than material. There will never be a sincere understanding between bosses and workers because the bosses above all want to remain bosses and secure always more power at the expense of the workers and the land, as well as by competition with other bosses, whereas the workers have had their fill of bosses and don't want more!

We are reformers today in so far as we seek to create the most favourable conditions and as large a body of enlightened militants so that a insurrection by the people would be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. But we will never recognize the institutions. We will take or win all possible reforms with the same spirit that one tears occupied territory from the enemy's grasp in order to go on advancing, and we will always remain enemies of every government, whether it be that of the Democrats today, or the Republican or Socialist governments of tomorrow.

Since no one can do everything in this world, one must choose one's own line of conduct. The rest follows.

#4

The word "anarchy" was universally used in the sense of disorder and confusion; and it is to this day used in that sense by the uninformed as well as by political opponents with an interest in distorting the truth.

We will not enter into a philological discussion, since the question is historical and not philological. The common interpretation of the word recognises its true and etymological meaning; but it is a derivative of that meaning due to the prejudiced view that government was a necessary organ of social life, and that consequently a society without government would be at the mercy of disorder, and fluctuate between the unbridled arrogance of some, and the blind vengeance of others.

The existence of this prejudice and its influence on the public's definition of the word "anarchy" is easily explained. Humans, like all living beings, adapt and accustom themselves to the conditions under which they live and pass on acquired habits. Thus, having been born and bred in bondage, when the descendants of a long line of slaves started to think, they believed that slavery was an essential condition of life and freedom seemed impossible to them. Similarly, workers who for centuries were obliged, and therefore accustomed, to depend for work, that is bread, on the goodwill of the master, and to see their lives always at the mercy of the owners of the land and of capital, ended by believing that it is the master who feeds them, and ingenuously ask one how would it be possible to live if there were no masters.

So, since it was thought that government was necessary and that without government there could only be disorder and confusion, it was natural and logical that anarchy, which means absence of government, should sound like absence of order. Nor is the phenomenon without parallel in the history of words. In times and in countries where the people believed in the need for government by one man (monarchy) the word republic, which is government by many, was in fact used in the sense of disorder and confusion — and this meaning is still to be found in the popular language of almost all countries.

Change opinion, convince the public that government is not only unnecessary but extremely harmful, and then the word anarchy, just because it means absence of government, will come

to mean for everybody: natural order, unity of human needs and the interests of all, complete freedom within complete solidarity.

Those who say, therefore, that the anarchists have badly chosen their name because it is wrongly interpreted by the masses and lends itself to wrong interpretations, are mistaken. The error does not come from the word but from the thing; and the difficulties anarchists face in their propaganda do not depend on the name they have taken, but on the fact that their concept clashes with all the public's long established prejudices on the function of government, or the State as it is also called.

The Revolution is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies; it is the new spirit of justice, of solidarity, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life, raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their direct and conscious action, for their own futures. Revolution is the organisation of all public services by those who work in them in their own interest as well as the public's; Revolution is the destruction of all coercive ties; it is the autonomy of groups, of communes, of regions; Revolution is the free federation brought about by a desire for solidarity, by individual and collective interests, by the needs of production and defence; Revolution is the constitution of innumerable free groupings based on ideas, wishes, and tastes of all kinds that exist among the people; Revolution is the forming and disbanding of thousands of representative, district, communal, regional, national bodies which, without having any legislative power, serve to make known and to coordinate the desires and interests of people near and far and which act through information, advice and example. Revolution is freedom proved in the crucible of facts — and lasts so long as freedom lasts, that is until others, taking advantage of the weariness that overtakes the masses, of the inevitable disappointments that follow exaggerated hopes, of the probable errors and human faults, succeed in constituting a power, which supported by an army of conscripts or mercenaries, lays down the law, arrests the movement at the point it has reached, and then begins the reaction.

#5

Anarchists are people who, in a century where freedom of opinion is preached everywhere, have believed it to be their right and duty to appeal for unlimited liberty. Throughout the world there are a few thousand of us, maybe a few million, for we have no merit other than saying out loud what the crowd is thinking. We are a few million workers who claim absolute liberty, nothing but liberty, every liberty.

We want liberty; we claim for every human being the right to do whatever they please and the means by which to do it. A person has the right to satisfy all their needs completely, with no limit other than natural impossibilities and the needs of their neighbours, which must be respected equally with their own.

We want freedom, and we believe its existence incompatible with the existence of any power whatsoever, no matter what its origin and form, no matter whether it be elected or imposed, monarchist or republican, inspired by divine right, popular right, holy oil, or universal suffrage.

History teaches us that every government is like every other government and that all are worth the same. The best are the worst. In some there is more cynicism, in others more hypocrisy, but at bottom there are always the same procedures, always the same intolerance. There is no

government, including even the ones that appear the most liberal, which does not have in the dust of its legislative arsenals some good little law about the Anarchist International to use against inconvenient opposition.

Evil, in the eyes of anarchists, does not dwell in one form of government more than any other. Evil lies in the idea of government itself. The principle of authority is evil.

Our ideal for human relations is to substitute free contract, perpetually open to revision or cancellation, in place of administrative and legal guardianship and imposed discipline.

Anarchists propose teaching people to do without government as they are already learning to do without God.

Anarchists will also teach people to get along without private ownership. Indeed, the worst tyrant is not the one who locks you up; it is the one who starves you. The worst tyrant is not the one who takes you by the collar; it is the one who takes you by the belly.

No liberty without equality! There is no liberty in a society where capital is monopolized in the hands of an increasingly smaller minority, in a society where nothing is divided equally, not even public education, which is paid for by everyone's money.

We believe that capital is the common patrimony of mankind because it is the fruit of the collaboration between past and present generations, and that it ought to be put at the disposal of everyone so that no one is excluded and no one can hoard one part of it to the detriment of others. Once this capital is distributed, we wish to destroy capital forever.

In a word, what we want is equality. We want actual equality as the corollary of liberty, indeed as its essential preliminary condition. From each according to their abilities; to each according to their needs.

That is what we want; that is what our energies are devoted to. It is what shall be, because no limitation can prevail against claims that are both legitimate and necessary. That is why the government wishes to discredit us. Scoundrels that we are, we claim bread for all, knowledge for all, freedom for all, independence and justice for all.

#6

In conflict with my whole being, I am about to set out the fundamental elements of insurrectionalist anarchism anatomically. Will it be possible? I don't know. I shall try. If the reading of these notes begins to suffocate, then just skip through them and leave it at that. A mass insurrection, or that of a whole people, can at any given moment lead to the State's incapacity to maintain order and respect for the law and even lead to the disintegration of social and economic conditions. This also implies the presence of individuals and groups that are capable of grasping this disintegration beyond its immediate manifestations. They must be able to see beyond the often chance and secondary reasons for the initial insurrectional outburst. In order to give their contribution to the struggle, they must look beyond the first clashes and skirmishes, not put a brake on them or underestimate them as mere incoherent insufferance towards those in power.

But who is prepared to take on this task? It could be anarchists, not so much because of their basic ideological choice and declared denial of all authority, as for their capacity to evaluate methods of struggle and organisational projects.

Moreover, only those who have rebelled and faced the consequences of this rebellion and lived it to the full, be it only within the microcosm of their own lives, can have the sensitivity

and intuition necessary to grasp the signs of the insurrectional movement in course. Not all anarchists are rebels, just as not all rebels are anarchists. To complicate things, it is not enough to be a rebel to understand the rebellion of others. It is also necessary to be willing to understand. We need to look at the economic and social conditions around us. We must not let ourselves be swept away like a river in full swell by the resounding demonstrations of the popular movement, even when it is moving full steam ahead and its initial triumphs lead us to hoist banners of illusion. Critique is always the first instrument, the starting point. But this must not merely be a surly taking sides. It must be a participatory critique, one that involves the heart, feels the excitement of the clash against the same enemy, now with its face finally stamped in the dust. It is not enough simply to rebel. Even if a hundred rebels were to get together it would still not be sufficient, they would merely be a hundred crazed molecules writhing in destructive agony as the struggle spreads, wildly sweeping everything away. Important as an example and stimulus, rebels end up succumbing to the needs of the moment. No matter how effective and radical they are, the more their conscience carries them to attack — often blindly — the more they become aware of an insurmountable limit due to their failure to see any organisational outlet. They wait for suggestions from the mass in revolt, a word here, a word there, in the quick of the clash or during moments of calm when everyone wants to talk before taking up the struggle again. And they are not aware that even during these exciting moments there are always politicians waiting in ambush. The masses do not possess the virtues we often attribute to them. The assembly is certainly not the place to put one's life at risk, but one's life can be put at risk by decisions made in assemblies. And the political animals that raise their heads in these collective moments always have clear ideas concerning what to suggest, with fine programmes of recuperation and a call to order already in their pockets. Of course, they will not say anything that is not absolutely correct, politically, I mean, so will be taken to be revolutionaries. But they are always the same, the same old political animals laying the foundations for the power of the future, the kind that recuperates the revolutionary thrust and addresses it towards pacification. We must limit destruction, comrades. Please, after all, what we are destroying belongs to us...and so on.

To shoot before — and more quickly than — others, is a virtue of the Far West: it's good for a day or two, then you need to use your head. And using your head means you need a project. So the anarchist cannot simply be a rebel, he or she must be a rebel equipped with a project. He or she must, that is, unite courage and heart with the knowledge and foresight of action. Their decisions will still always be illuminated with the flames of destruction, but sustained with the fuel of critical analysis.

Now, if we think about it for a moment, a project cannot just turn up out of the blue in the middle of the fray. It is silly to think that everything must come forth from the insurgent people. That would be blind determinism and would consign us gagged into the hands of the first politician that stood up on a chair and made a few organisational and programmatic proposals, throwing smoke in everyone's eyes with a few words strung one after the other. Although insurrection is a revolutionary moment of great collective creativity, one which can produce analytical suggestions of considerable intensity (think of the insurgent workers of the Paris Commune who shot at the clocks), it is not the only source of theoretical and projectual wealth. The highest moments of the people in arms undoubtedly eliminate obstacles and uncertainties, clearly showing what had only been hazy until then, but they cannot illuminate what is not already there. These moments are the potent reflector that make it possible to bring about a revolutionary and anarchist project,

but this project must already exist, even if only in terms of method. It must have been elaborated and experimented to some degree, although obviously not in every detail.

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