

On Writing for Anarkismo.net

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Paul Goodman, 1962: “*...The main thing I have to teach my young friends is...the perhaps encouraging, and certainly painful, factual demonstration that a man [Note] can hold such a doctrine and more or less live it during years of vicissitudes, and be still pitching. It is not impossible to ‘make it,’ to be somewhat accepted by the great world; but if you are still conscious, you will be stricken with the same dismay...The hope in face-to-face community that I have expressed in this book is still the only truth I know.*” (“Preface”, Drawing the Line; A Pamphlet. NY: Random House; p. ix)

This is now the end of 2006. It has been a year and a half since I have begun writing monthly essays for the Anarkismo.net website, the Internet voice of our (pro-organizational anarchism's) international tendency. The comrades who have organized Anarkismo have given me an opportunity to express my opinions. I am deeply grateful to them for this platform. How many people have read each essay, I have no idea, but at least some essays have been fairly widely distributed, such as the one on the Israeli-Lebanese war. I appreciate those friends who have sent some of my writings to other sites. A few have been translated into several languages.

There is often a lively and interesting discussion following my essays, on Anarkismo and other sites, and I have learned a good deal from these responses. My topics have occasionally been highly controversial among anarchists. This was particularly true for my essays on national liberation. My views have also been attacked by advocates of anti-organizationalist and primitivist varieties of anarchism. They have been critiqued from the point of view of Parecon. Maoists have demanded to know what evidence there is for my statement that Stalin murdered tens of millions of people (!).

Through my years of far-left political activities and theoretical study, including making many mistakes, I have gained some knowledge (if not necessarily wisdom). My conception of my role is this: I would like to pass on what I have learned and am still learning. My brother has challenged me, “Aren’t you just preaching to the choir?” Exactly, I replied. There is so much theoretical and programmatic confusion among anarchists, that it is useful for someone to talk with (if not “preach to”) “the choir.” Not that I expect anyone to take my thoughts as the word from on high. I would like others to think about what I have to say, to compare it to what they have learned elsewhere, and come up with their own conclusions.

As a teenager I became interested in anarchist-pacifism from the works of Paul Goodman and Dwight Macdonald and also the humanist Marxist, Erich Fromm. From them, I learned the value of decentralism and face-to-face democracy which has stayed with me ever since. In college, while in S.D.S., I became convinced of the need for revolution and that anarchist-pacifism was not adequate for such a goal. I became a Trotskyist (and therefore a Leninist and Marxist). Of the Trotskyists, I joined the tendency which advocated “socialism from below” and which rejected Trotsky’s theory that the Soviet Union under Stalin remained a “workers’ state.” I studied Marx (leading a study group on the three volumes of Capital), and Lenin, Trotsky, and Rosa Luxemburg. I have also studied libertarian Marxists, including William Morris, Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Paul Mattick, Sr.

Organizationally, I was a founding member of the International Socialists, which was the U.S. ally of what is now the Socialist Workers Party in Britain. At the time, Stalinism was very influential, due to the attraction of Ho Chi Minh, Castro, and Mao, who were fighting U.S. imperialism. We anti-Stalinist Trotskyists were pretty marginal, as against the pro-Stalinist (“orthodox”) wing of the Trotskyists, as well as the Maoists. Today the U.S. descendants of the I.S. includes the International Socialist Organization. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the I.S.O. has now become the leading U.S. Trotskyists.

But before this developed, my friends and I had split away from the I.S. to form the Revolutionary Socialist League. We thought that the I.S. was not really revolutionary (a view I still hold about the I.S.O.) and that the solution lay in dissident Trotskyism (which I now reject). The R.S.L. achieved a number of things, but over time, our Trotskyism—and even our Marxism—was attenuated by the women’s liberation movement and the Gay liberation movement, among other matters. We evolved into revolutionary anarchism. (See Ron Taber’s *A Look at Leninism*, 1988, NY: Aspect Foundation.) I returned to reading anarchist and decentralist theorists.

Eventually the R.S.L. dissolved. About 5 of us participated in the creation of the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation. This also had a number of achievements. But in a time of stagnation, some of its influential members turned toward Maoism. A few of us ex-R.S.L.ers led a faction fight against this turn to Stalinism, a fight which effectively broke up Love and Rage. After a number of years, I joined the Northeastern Federation of Anarchist-Communists. One other ex-R.S.L.er, W.E.B., also joined NEFAC.

Through all these experiences (and I have left out my activities in the antiwar movement and in the teachers’ union), I tried to stay true to the humanistic vision of a liberated socialism from below. Like Paul Goodman, I believe in face-to-face, democratic, community and have looked for ways to achieve it. I did not run the sort of risks which face revolutionaries in other countries, such as imprisonment, torture, or death. At worst I spent some money and sat through a great many boring meetings. I made many mistakes and hopefully learned some important things.

My history has been used by some to attack me personally. It has been charged that I am not really an anarchist, but actually a “closet Trotskyist.” Actually I regard myself as a Marxist-informed anarchist. I identify with the tradition of revolutionary anarchist-communism. But frankly it is not important to me to “prove” that I am an orthodox anarchist (whatever that would be). Usually I call myself a “socialist-anarchist,” as did Malatesta, but I would be perfectly happy to call myself a “decentralist socialist.” Since this is not in use, I could call myself a “libertarian” or “antiauthoritarian” socialist. Or whatever. Similarly, some political opponents (sometimes the same ones) have sneered at my education—I have a doctorate in school psychology—or occupation: I

have been a teacher and a school psychologist for many years, punching a time clock and paying union dues—that is, a white collar worker.

Raising such issues is a trick. It is meant to make me the issue instead of my ideas. Rather than debate me, these opponents chose to focus on irrelevancies about me as a person. These are typical methods in bourgeois politics and belong in “debates” between the Democrats and Republicans, not on the left. I admit to taking some ideas from Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg (such as imperialism, the united front, or the mass strike), while rejecting their overall politics. Nor do I agree with Marxism as a total system; I reject Marx’s centralism and inevitabilism. What this means can be seen by reading my essays (such as the discussion of the nature of the former Soviet Union). Many important activists and theorists have been Trotskyists before becoming libertarian socialists (of either the anarchist or libertarian Marxist variety). This includes Murray Bookchin, C.L.R. James, Castoriadis, Maurice Brinton, and Daniel Guerin. I have no problem being in their company.

In any case, I intend to go on writing essays at the end of each month for the Anarkismo site, so long as they let me. Goodman’s “hope of face-to-face community” can only be realized through an international revolution of the working class and all oppressed people, to be achieved by the self-organization of the oppressed, including the organizing of anarchists. This is “the only truth I know.”

I wish all comrades and friends a Merry Winter Solstice and a Happy New Year!

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