

Revolutionary Class-Struggle Anarchism

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The Utopian Vision

Anarchism is the end of all forms of domination, hierarchy, and oppression. It opposes capitalism, white supremacy, male supremacy, homophobia, imperialism, militarism, environmental destruction, and so on. Anarchism is the most extreme form of democracy, freedom, and self-management, applied throughout society. Time and again, revolutions have resulted in popular assemblies, neighborhood gatherings, workplace committees, etc. These have sent elected individuals to associated councils, individuals who were immediately recallable and controllable by the grassroots assemblies. These decentralized assemblies expressed the need of human beings for face-to-face association, going back to the small “tribes” and villages in which humanity lived for most of its existence. They appeared in the directly democratic eclesia of ancient Athens, in the town councils of New England, in the 1871 Paris Commune, in the original soviets of the Russian Revolution, in the workers’ councils of Hungary 1956, in the Argentinian horizontalized neighborhood gatherings and workplace occupations, and in many other revolutionary situations.

In place of the capitalist economy, with its markets and centralized, stratified, planning, anarchism would institute classless socialism. Production would be collective and cooperative, not privatized or competitive. Production would be for use, not for profit. It would be coordinated by democratic planning-from-below. The “economy” might be thought of as a federation of producers’ cooperatives, consumers’ cooperatives, and collectivized communes. The workplace and the community would be self-managing through their assemblies and coordinated through a decentralized federalism.

Regions and even communities would try to produce as much as possible of what they need on a local level, but total self-sufficiency is impossible and undesirable. Decentralization makes face-to-face democracy possible, benefits ecological balance, and makes it easier to have bottom-up democratic economic planning.

One of the first things the workers would do right after a revolution would be to begin to transform the technology inherited from capitalism. Technology would be revamped in order to create an ecologically sustainable society. Technology, and production in general, would also be reorganized to abolish the division between order-givers and order-takers, bosses and bossed, those who use mental labor and those who perform manual labor. This is essential if we are to avoid the creation of a new, state capitalist, ruling class.

The state would be abolished, defining “state” to mean a specialized, bureaucratized, socially-alienated, institution above the rest of society. In its place would be the association of assemblies and councils. When everyone is involved in governing, then there is no (distinct) government. The layers of specialized police and military would be replaced by the armed people, a popular militia—so long as it is still needed—under the civilian control of the councils.

The Anarchist Method

Right now it is only possible to draw up broad principles, and to speculate how these would be applied by future generations. One thing we may postulate is that a post-revolutionary society will be flexible, regional, pluralistic, and above all, experimental (this was called the “anarchist method” by Errico Malatesta and by Paul Goodman). So long as there is no revival of capitalist

exploitation, such pluralistic experimentation should be expected, since there are distinct differences in the history, geography, and cultures of the regions of North America, not to say of the world. No one has all the answers about how a postcapitalist society might work.

Different regions may experiment with various plans for democratic economic planning, such as Parecon, or the ideas of Pat Devine or the “Inclusive Democracy” of Takis Fotopoulos. Furthermore, one region may chose to immediately try full communism, with people being given what they need and working only for social motives. Another region might insist on incentives, with workers being paid (in vouchers, say) for the effort they put out. This may or may not be combined with a communist sector of society (free health care, minimum food, clothing, and shelter), which some regions may chose to expand over decades or generations, until they have full communism (similar to Marx’s approach).

Some regions may try to coordinate society through a federation of workers’ councils, while others may try federations of community assemblies. Within the limits of a democratic federalism, some regions might be relatively more centralized and others relatively more decentralized. Different local methods would be tried for settling disputes or for protecting people from anti-social actors, so long as they exist. Regions would learn from each other, rejecting failures and copying successes.

While there would be as much decentralization as is practically possible and advantageous, continental and international federations would also be necessary, to deal with practical issues of trade and other matters. For example, so long as there are some imperialist states, then the free societies would have to be prepared to defend themselves—with mutual coordination of militia-based armed forces.

Nonclass issues, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and nationality, would also be addressed using the same “anarchist method” of decentralization, self-organization, and experimentation. Women would be no longer dependent on men, economically or otherwise, even for childcare, which would be a responsibility of society. Women will be free to organize themselves separately or together with men, in order to fight against male supremacy and to develop their full potentialities. How would people develop romantic and sexual relationships? How will people develop their sexual and other identities? How will society raise children? Such things cannot be predicted, but only developed by the people involved.

People of Color will also be able to organize themselves, separately or together with white people, in various forms of association. There will no longer be a capitalist system which benefits from racism, but that does not mean that all racism will automatically disappear. People of Color will be able to organize and fight for their interests. They can decide whether to separate out or to assimilate with white people, or to create whatever interracial relationship they find most comfortable—through self-organization and experimentation.

Revolutionary Strategy

Revolutionary anarchism is consistent in its means and its ends. It advocates a movement which is built on self-organization and self-determination, in order to achieve a society of self-organization and self-determination. It supports struggles for reforms, for improvements in the living conditions of the people: the formation of unions, higher wages and shorter hours, antidiscrimination laws for women and People of Color, universal health care, ending whatever

imperialist wars are going on at the time, defense of civil liberties from the state and from fascists, defense of the ecology, etc. We must support these demands because they are just, because people have the right to choose what they will fight for, and because we are for whatever gets people in motion against the rulers. Wherever possible, we should seek to expand these issues by linking them with other issues, by generalizing them into class-wide demands on the whole capitalist class and its state, and by proposing the most militant methods of mobilization.

But we must always tell the truth to the working people: this system cannot achieve consistently decent standards of living or democratic rights. Instead, it is presently attacking these standards, as it must, due to its fundamental economic crisis. We must warn that the rulers will not allow the working class and oppressed to gradually organize and take over society. At some point, they will come down hard on us. When they feel it necessary, they will jettison elections and civil liberties, mobilize the military and police as well as fascist bands, whip up racial and sexual hysteria, and establish totalitarianism. If they can.

Working people will need to forestall this by winning over the ranks of the military, and eventually smashing the state, dismantling capitalism and all forms of oppression, and establishing a federation of popular councils—that is, to take power (but not “take state power,” not create a new state). In other words, make a revolution. Today we are far from the point of a clash between revolution and counterrevolution, yet, but this needs to be a long term guiding strategy. Even now, reforms are best won when the people are most militant, self-reliant, and threatening to the ruling class, that is, when most nearly revolutionary.

And even now revolutionaries should prepare the workers by advocating mass strikes which are ready to defend themselves from scabs, vigilantes, and illegal police actions. We need to organize people to fight back against fascists in our neighborhoods. We should oppose “gun control” laws.

The Revolutionary Agent

Who will make the revolution? It will not be an elite vanguard party acting for the people, which hopes to take state power by riding a revolution, nor an elite electoral party which plans to get elected into state power. It will be the big majority of people, all those who have been oppressed and exploited. All forms of oppression overlap and intertwine with each other, mutually maintaining all oppressions, including that of women, of Queers, of People of Color, of the Disabled, etc. It is these who will rise up, and are struggling even now, and will eventually make the revolution.

Class struggle anarchists see a central role for the working class, blue collar and white collar—and “pink collar”—the majority of the population, which includes all other oppressed groups, as well as non-waged members of the class such as the unemployed, workers’ children, and homemakers. Workers are not more morally oppressed than anyone else (such as the Deaf). But, strategically, workers have an enormous potential power. With our hands on the means of production, transportation, communication, and social services, our class could stop society in its tracks. We could start it up again on a new and better basis.

The most potentially revolutionary are in the overlapping sectors of the oppressed and exploited. Black workers, women workers (or Black women workers), and other such groupings, are among the most oppressed sections of the working class, those without corrupting privileges,

those who have “nothing to lose but their chains.” Although a minority, such groupings are likely to be in the very forefront of the struggle. When they rise up, all of society is heaved into the air and all issues become open.

Anarchist Revolutionary Organization

Anarchists have played important roles in many revolutions, but have invariably been defeated. One reason for this history of defeat is the failure of the anarchist revolutionary minority to organize itself into a distinct political organization. A democratic federation could develop a coherent analysis and program, could coordinate the activities of members, and could spread its ideas through its literature. It would not include all anarchists, but only those who agreed with its program. It would not be a “party”, since it does not aim at ruling a state. This approach has been called Platformism or *especificismo*.

The anarchist organization would work into broader mass organizations, such as unions, community groups, and associations of specifically oppressed groups. It would fight for these to rely on themselves and not on bosses, always encouraging rank-and-file democracy and militancy. It would fight against elitist organizations, such as liberals, Marxist-Leninists, or fascists. But it would seek to cooperate with other groupings wherever possible, on the grounds that no one organization has all the good ideas or all the best militants. It would not dissolve itself into broader popular organization, as opportunists do, nor would it only look inward, seeking the perfect theory, as sectarians do. Instead it would be part of a constant dialogue between the most radicalized layer and the as yet more conservative majority, whereby each learns from the other.

Building a revolutionary organization is not counterposed to the self-organization of the working class and the oppressed. Rather it is an integral part of that self-organization. There is never one moment when all the oppressed suddenly see the light and become socialist anarchists. Rather people come to political awareness by layers. In conservative times, it is by ones and twos. In radicalizing periods, clusters of people become radicals. These band together in order to win over other people. Only in immediately revolutionary periods are large majorities ready for a democratic uprising (which is what defines a revolutionary period).

Our Response to the Crisis

We are in a period of crisis. Since the end of the post-World War II boom in the late 60s, there have been ups and downs, but the overall direction of the economy has been downhill. In our deindustrialized economy, with its shrunken unions, the workers’ incomes are plummeting. As the economy worsens, big business has worked to lower the workers’ standard of living, to cut social services for the poor, and cut taxes on the rich, in order to raise their profits. Meanwhile people have become aware of the threat posed by worldwide ecological catastrophe, as well as the evils of international wars (including the spread of nuclear bombs). Official politics has swung far to the right, with extreme reactionaries taking over the Republicans, and the Democrats staying just a bit to their left.

Working people and oppressed people are getting fed up. There is a “danger” (for the capitalists) of an explosion. So the most farsighted U.S. capitalists have once again, as they have many times before, set up a (mildly) progressive Democratic candidate to channel discontent into safer

directions. The Democratic Party served as the death trap for the Populists of the 19th century, the labor unions of the 30s, the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 60s. Now led by a charismatic Black politician, it gets the support of those who are desperate for a change from the disasters and incompetence of the vile George W. Bush. If elected, Barak Obama will lead the way in forcing austerity on the working population and reorganizing the U.S.'s imperialist wars, so as to downplay Iraq and increase the invasion of Afghanistan. If he loses, it will be used to demoralize his followers.

In this context, it is hard for a revolutionary minority to go against the stream, to oppose the Democrats and to tell the truth about the party and its candidates. We must explain, respectfully and patiently, that unions and communities of the oppressed should break from the Democratic Party and from the passivity of all electoralism. Instead we need to talk up independent mass action: demonstrations, civil disobedience, strikes, and especially the general strike.

Most union and oppressed activists are liberals or reform socialists; they support capitalism or at least do not believe in revolution. So it is understandable that they should support a capitalist party. It is different with those who call themselves revolutionaries, socialists, or anarchists. They should know better. Rather than capitulating to the present-day liberal consciousness of the majority, we should be preparing ourselves for the coming mass radicalization, when people get fed up with both Republicans and Democrats.

Radicals should reject the often-made distinction between a utopian vision and a scientific analysis and strategy. Both are needed, together. Humanity is faced with the threats of economic collapse, fascism, wars, and destruction through nuclear war or environmental catastrophe. A socialist anarchist revolution is not only something which would be good. It is necessary for the survival of humanity.

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