

The People Aren't Alright

Preserving Anarchy in a Fascist World

ziq

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With authoritarian and fascist parties gaining substantial popular support all across the world, maybe it's time for anarchists to reconsider one of our movement's most persistent assumptions: that "the people" are, in some latent sense, a revolutionary force waiting to be awakened by true believers.

As fascists and other authoritarians outnumber us by practically ten thousand to one in this rapidly collapsing empire, anarchists ought to take a sober look around them and abandon the comforting fiction that we live to serve "the people" and bring about their emancipation. That "the people" yearn for freedom and would stand with us if only we could inspire them with our good deeds and thoughtful theory.

The people are not automatically allies of liberation. Mass-society is much more often the social base through which domination reproduces itself. Again and again, when the masses have their privileges threatened, they rally to hierarchy, nationalism, nativism, patriarchy, and obedience, expunging class solidarity in favor of the promise of a higher place on the ladder of whiteness.

Anyone with any instinct for self-preservation ought to abandon the fruitless fantasy that our mission under this fascist social order is to educate the masses — to reveal their "true" interests and thereby set them on the path to class consciousness, even as an overwhelming majority of them toil feverishly to bring their fascist despots to power and to wage genocide on the most impoverished souls on the planet.

The idea that our zines and memes can compete with billionaires and the 24/7 algorithms that feed billions of people a relentless stream of authoritarianism, fear, and hatred is laughable.

I've long been rebuked within the milieu for rhetoric deemed too hostile, too alienating, too negative, too likely to frighten away the poor, innocent reactionary elements whose support we are apparently expected to cultivate.

The truth is I never cared about "converting" feckless authority-cravers to anarchy.

My mission was never to win over every liberal settler, every future landlord, every aspiring bureaucrat, every eager democrat, every left-wing Zionist, every comfortable professional, or every reactionary who might be persuaded to call themselves an anarchist. It was never to assemble the largest possible coalition by sanding down every point of conflict until anarchy became palatable to people invested in the existing order.

All I ever cared about was confronting the relationships and institutions through which domination is reproduced, and to foster solidarity with those ready and willing to resist them.

The people are not sacred. Their collective will is not inherently virtuous, nor is it beyond criticism. Their democratic "right" to choose fascism is not inviolable. Majorities forge domination much more effectively than the hapless, disconnected few who dare resist it.

Anarchists should be ready to confront, contest, and push back against the masses, while understanding how they become vehicles for hierarchy and oppression.

Every anarchist is at war with mass-society — not with humanity, but with the social order that turns domination into something ordinary, legitimate, and reproducible. And every anarchist must be prepared to stand against the tide when it inevitably brings tyranny crashing down on us again and again and again.

Fascism is no longer rising, it has risen. We are again in a fascist era. We live in fascist society. "The people" are fascists. "The people" are the enemy of everything anarchy stands for. A clear and present danger to the continued existence of anyone who resists the fascist order.

Yes, it is tragic that people who are genuinely being squeezed can be persuaded to blame those being squeezed alongside them. When wages stagnate, housing becomes unaffordable, public services buckle, and economic security evaporates — migrants, trans people, disabled people and ethnic minorities become an obvious and convenient target: visible, vulnerable, and lacking the institutional power to fight back.

It's tragic, but the people holding the pitchforks are utterly unworthy of your sympathy.

The drag queen is visible and within reach; the billionaire's ownership structure is not. The migrant competing for housing is tangible; decades of weakened labor bargaining power are abstract. A politician promising to "take back control" offers an identifiable enemy and an immediate emotional outlet, while confronting concentrated economic power demands a much more difficult analysis.

The people are lazy.

Yes, the billionaires, the media and the political class are the ones channeling the wrath of the people toward the vulnerable rather than toward the structures and interests that produced those conditions. But that does not absolve the immense number of people who choose to direct their anger at the most marginalized and downtrodden within their reach. They do it because it's easy. Because it feels good to punch down.

The people are cruel.

They do it because they want to feel powerful. Because lashing out at anyone different and inflicting pain gives them some kind of sick relief. They do it because they want blood. Because they are callous, horrible, fucked up fascists.

Yes, their hate has been manufactured by the algorithm and decades of late-stage-capitalist anxiety, but that does not relieve them of responsibility for their fascist inclinations.

They have the whole world at their fingertips: it would take them a few minutes to open their minds to the divide-and-conquer tactics being used on them and detach themselves from it. They could turn off the talking heads on their screens telling them migrants are destroying Western civilization, snatching their children, fucking their wives. But they won't.

Instead of asking why so many people have so little while so few possess so much, they *choose* to fight over who is deserving of the scraps that remain.

They are not victims. Structural manipulation isn't an excuse for treating people as incapable of independent judgment. Individuals can question the narratives offered to them. They can in-

investigate who benefits from particular political divisions. They can recognize that the person next door competing for the same scarce resources is not responsible for the scarcity itself.

When they refuse to do so, responsibility cannot simply be transferred upward to algorithms, politicians, or billionaires. Fascists do not become fascists by accident. Propaganda can cultivate, legitimize, and amplify hatred, but it does not absolve those who embrace it.

No one is conned into hating others; the capacity for cruelty and exclusion has to be met by a willingness to indulge it. What changes is not necessarily the existence of that impulse, but the social conditions that make expressing it feel acceptable, make it popular.

We've been in this game for a long time now. Our friends and allies are dying under the jackboots everyday.

It's time to abandon the expectation that liberation will arrive because a sufficiently large number of people will suddenly discover the beautiful idea and decide to rise up and demand freedom. There may be no sleeping giant you can poke to bring about a global anarchist utopia.

Reaching for anarchy in a grossly authoritarian world requires taking seriously the possibility that liberation may only emerge through select relationships, groups and associations rather than through the conversion of an entire population into a revolutionary subject.

Solidarity can be built wherever people challenge domination in their own lives, even as the ranks of those willing to do so grow thinner and thinner under the crushing tidal wave of fascism.

Let me be clear — This is not a battle between mass-society and some supposedly superior revolutionary minority. It is between relationships that reproduce domination and relationships that contest it.

If liberation depends upon discovering a benevolent popular will that has secretly been dormant beneath mass-society, every reactionary turn becomes a profound crisis of faith. If, instead, freedom is understood as something constructed through concrete relationships, practices, and battles against domination, there is no need to assume that history is secretly moving toward emancipation.

In a fascist world, surrendering to the will of the people is a clear death sentence.

Look around you. Take it all in with open eyes. Who is on the side of freedom?

It's an ever-shrinking number.

Billionaires, states, media outlets, and technology platforms possess vastly greater resources for shaping public attention and political narratives than the pitiful, mocked, ostracized, and belittled anarchists of the world.

The idea that anarchists can simply outcompete those forces by producing better arguments or performing acts of charity — sorry, mutual aid — rests on a rather questionable assumption about how political consciousness is actually formed.

When the majority sees your liberation as a threat, their power is not your weapon to wield. You can't wield the power of the people when the people want to kill you dead.

Since the people have chosen fascism, anarchists will move deeper into the cracks — not to abandon the world, but to cultivate the relationships, practices, and solidarities capable of surviving and resisting the order that seeks to destroy us. And indeed, punching up at the mass of people that pushed us into these cracks whenever we can.

Our survival now depends on what we assemble within these narrow cracks.

Our numbers have dwindled and will continue to dwindle, but the commitment of those who remain is enduring. We do not need the masses; we need the few people prepared to resist dom-

ination, sustain one another, and create something different in the cracks of this very worst timeline as millions of fascists goose-step willingly behind their leaders.

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