

**WHAT IS
ANARCHISM**

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FREEDOM PRESS 1^{d.}

*Published by
Freedom Press
27 Red Lion Street, London, W.C.1
July 1945
and printed by
Express Printers, London.*

What is Anarchism

TO MANY ENGLISH people anarchism remains what it has been represented by the ruling classes of the world since, seventy years ago, Michael Bakunin first lit the fire of social revolution across the skies of Europe—a creed of terror and destruction, of chaos and fratricidal social strife.

To the ruling classes it is indeed a creed of terror and destruction, for its success means the end of their world, the end of ease for the few at the cost of misery for the many, the end of privilege and exploitation, of the empire of money and greed.

But, as Michael Bakunin said, “the urge to destroy is also a creative urge.” And in the destruction of the present form of society, the anarchists envisage not the empire of chaos, but the growth of an integrated society of free co-operation, where equality will become real, where oppression and exploitation will be abolished, where men will live in peace and trust in a society based on justice and mutual aid between individuals, and where human life, freed from the fetter of poverty and oppression,

of government and property, will develop with a freedom and richness such as has only been approached spasmodically at the most vital periods of the world's history.

We will take it that no sincere man has any fundamental objection to our aim as stated in such general terms. Almost every person concerned with political thought will agree that such a form of society is desirable, and the attraction which the concept of freedom has for the majority of the people of every nation in the world is shown by the way in which our rulers use it continually in order to induce their subjects to fight in the interests of their respective imperialisms. Even the political parties, communists and socialists, which base their methods on principles of authority diametrically opposite to those of anarchism, at the same time claim as their ultimate objective the anarchist society where the state will mysteriously have withered away of its own accord.

These political gentry, however, pay only a token adherence to the concept of a free society. Their whole technique is, in fact based on a seizure of the machinery of authority and the replacement of the present exploiting class by a bureaucracy which will inherit its power and therefore its opportunities of privilege.

This process is entirely opposed to the concept of anarchism, and it is mere childishness to suppose that any class which has acquired power is likely to let it go again with any degree of ease. The state will never wither away. It must be destroyed at the roots.

Practicability of Anarchism

The general objection to anarchism is, then, not on grounds of its undesirability, but on the grounds of its impracticability. A long period of education will be needed, it is asserted, before they can be trusted not to turn freedom into licence, and, therefore, human nature being what it is, justice and equality can only be given to men through the kindly supervision over their affairs by governmental means. The anarchists, on the other hand, claim that theirs is the only means of achieving a just and equal society, that government is an institution that will of necessity breed privilege and inequality, and that insofar as it is true to say that men are at present unsocial beings, they are made so not by their innate characteristics, but by the fact that their natural aptitude towards mutual aid and co-operation for the fulfilment of common ends has been warped by the imposition of a system based on coercion and deceit—which are and must always be the two corner stones of authority.

Let us examine the causes which are responsible for injustice and misery of contemporary society. They are, briefly, the institutions of property and government—the economic exploitation and political domination of the many by the few.

The Class Society

Human society to-day—and this is true no less of countries that have remained semi-feudal or have become pseudo-socialist than of the plutocratic empires of the West—is divided into two classes, those who control the means of production and reap the profits from their exploitation, and the workers who operate the means of production for the smallest wage their exploiters dare to pay them. Between these two classes there is no interest in common, and the rivalry between them is inevitable so long as the exploitation of man by man is allowed to continue.

The anarchist therefore recognises the class struggle as an inevitable feature of present-day society, and also as a necessary factor in the supersession of the governmental society by the free society.

The system by which the control of the ownership of the means of production and distribution is vested in the hands of a few is anti-social, not only from the fact that it causes

some men to enjoy plenty while the majority live at or a little above starvation level, but also because it results in a retardment of the exploitation of the resources of nature and an artificial depression of the level of social life. The difference in the standard of human life which would result from a free and equal distribution of the present products of the land and of industry is small in comparison with the vast increase in production which would become available, concurrently with a great increase in leisure, if the means afforded by modern science to improve production, both on the land and in the workshops, were used to their full extent. The interests of private ownership, however, forbid the full use of scientific knowledge in this respect, and thus the miserably paid efforts of the worker are largely wasted on unproductive toil.

The State

But the system of property cannot be dissociated from the State, which began and has always existed as an instrument for the protection of the ruling class control over property. The state is the coercive superstructure on a property society which maintains, through its weapons of force, such as parliament, the police and the army, the domination and prosperity of the governing class as against the exploited workers. The socialists pretend that if *private* property

is abolished, if capitalism and landlordism are ended, then it will be possible to create an equitable society by governmental means, through the institution of the State. The anarchist, however, sees in the State the principal enemy of the working class. Even where private capitalism and landlordism are destroyed, as in Russia, the continued existence of the state preserves the institution of property.

The means of production may theoretically become vested in the hands of the workers, but while the state remains they will in practice be controlled by the ruling bureaucracy, who will become the *de facto* possessing class. The fact that the new ruling class may have come from the workers will make no difference, for their situation will force them to assume the role of an exploiting class. In order to maintain their position, they will have to use power. "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely." (These are not the words of an anarchist but the melancholy conclusion of a Victorian liberal after a lifetime studying the development of human institutions.) Power gives privilege, the privileges conferred by control of the goods of society, and it is proved by the verdict of history that men who have privileges do not lightly relinquish them or fail to make use of them for their own ends.

To-day the State is assuming a more dangerous and powerful form than ever before. In every country power is passing steadily into the hands of the growing bureaucrat class founded by the needs of the state. Political and economic control are coalescing into one body, so that the state and its ruling class can maintain more efficiently their control and exploitation.

It is clear, then, that if men are to become free and are to enjoy anything approaching a complete development of their faculties, the state must be abolished, together with the system of property, and other means of exploitation, such as the wages system, which are contingent to it.

Making the Free Society

In the place of the state the anarchists advocate the establishment of a society in which the principle or organisation would be not the government of men, but the administration of economic resources by means of the voluntary co-operation of the workers.

In order to overthrow the present society and to establish the new one, we advocate the method of syndicalism, by which is meant the organisation of the workers in syndicates or unions on an industrial basis, at their places of work.

Syndicates differ from ordinary trade unions in that they are organised not primarily for the securing of reformist amelioration of conditions under capitalism, but for carrying out the social revolution by means of economic action—although they support in every way the day-to-day struggle of the workers both as a means of weakening the ruling class and in order to educate the workers in the tactics of the class struggle. . The syndicates, moreover, differ from the trade unions in the fact that instead of being centralised organisations with governing bureaucracies, they are federations of freely connected groups of workers organised in the various factories of each industry.

In the present form of society the role of the syndicates is to prepare the workers for the revolution. Revolutions cannot be made, as Bakunin pointed out, but preparations can be made so that when they occur the workers realise what action to take in order to secure the successful overthrow of the state and the establishment of a free society.

In the prosecution of the class struggle the anarchists reject all reformist or parliamentary methods, which merely play into the hands of the ruling class and lead to fatal class collaboration. The revolution may be maintained and won only by the direct action of the workers themselves on the economic field

where they hold the decisive power. In the revolution the syndicates will be the organisations by which the workers will carry out the social general strike, seize the factories, farms and railways, and expel the property owners and the representatives of the state.

Structure of Anarchy

After the revolution, the syndicates will serve as the basis for the building of the new society. The industries will be run by the workers themselves, each factory by the men and women who work there, each farm by the farm workers. The factories in each industry will be organised into regional and national federations, for the purpose of co-ordinating production, and in order to co-ordinate the various industries there will be a general federation of industries. Distribution will be undertaken by syndicates of distributive workers, who will run the stores from which goods will be distributed to the people. Public services, like teaching and medicine, will be undertaken by the syndicates of teachers, doctors, nurses, etc., and such municipal services as are necessary will be undertaken by local communes, which will also be federated regionally and nationally in the same manner as the syndicates. None of the regional or national federations will be vested with any authority—they will be merely organisations for voluntary

co-ordination and the transmission of information.

With the ending of a property society, the state and all its appendages will vanish. A free society where there are no vested interests will have no need of parliaments, codes of law, police, armies, etc., all of which are intended to preserve property rights. The workers themselves can be left to deal with any people who attempt to interfere with their liberties, once they have gained them.

Another consequence of the abolition of property will be the ending of the money and wages systems, which have been among the most effective means of oppressing the people in the past. Instead of money, goods will be distributed to people who need them, and there will be no attempt at the impossible task of assessing the quantity of food given out by the amount or quality of work done by the recipient. Once the increase in production has been expedited, the principle of "From each according to his means, to each according to his needs," will be applied.

Evolution of Freedom

As anarchism is based on the belief in a continually evolving society, it is impossible to make any blue print for society once freedom has been achieved. The centralised, large-scale

forms of industrial organisation will probably be followed by a great decentralisation of function and administration, a breaking into smaller functional and communal groups, and the break-up of the factory system, as well as a closer integration between town and country are likely. But first the revolution must be made and the present means of production taken over by the syndicates and developed by the workers.

This is a period when the old social forms are passing away, when forms of power are changing, when the State itself seems to be driving humanity towards the chaos of a new dark age of brutality and want. It is for the workers to use their power now to destroy authority and the property which it protects, and to erect in their place not another edifice of authority under the guise of "revolutionary government" or "workers' state," but the free society of anarchy, in which alone justice and equity can determine the lives of men and human society develop in freedom to a stage of plenty and happiness for all men which the developments of science and the resources of nature have made possible in the modern age.

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London, W.C.1.