

What is Anarchism?



Anarchists are often mentioned in the newspaper and TV coverage of globalisation protests. We are often portrayed as violent criminals. Almost never are the ideas of anarchism explained. Read on and find out what anarchists stand for.

Anarchists believe in a revolution by the working class which will overthrow the bosses and their governments, and create a society run and controlled by those who actually produce the wealth of the world. We believe that it is possible to live without government and to put in its place councils and assemblies where the 'ordinary people' can decide what happens to this wealth. We believe in the equality of all and that maximum solidarity is needed between workers and other oppressed groups if we are to defeat those who live off our sweat.

When you hear about anarchists you are led to believe that we are mad bombers. The myth is created that we believe in violence for the sake of it. The other myth is that anarchism is chaos. It is claimed by politicians, bosses and their hacks in the media that if there was no government there would be chaos. But did you ever wonder about society today and come to the conclusion that perhaps we are already living in chaos?

You might ask why is this so? We say that there is one big reason - PROFIT! At the moment we live in a society in which there are two major classes - the bosses and the workers. The bosses own the factories, banks, shops, etc. Workers don't. All we have is our labour, which we use to make a living. Workers are compelled to sell their Labour to the boss for a wage. The boss is interested in squeezing as much work out of the worker for as little wages as possible so that he/she can maintain high profits. Thus the more wages workers get the less profits the bosses make. Their interests are in total opposition to each other.

Production is not based on the needs of ordinary people. Production is for profit. Therefore although there is enough food in the world to feed everyone, people starve because profits come first. This is capitalism.

What is the State?

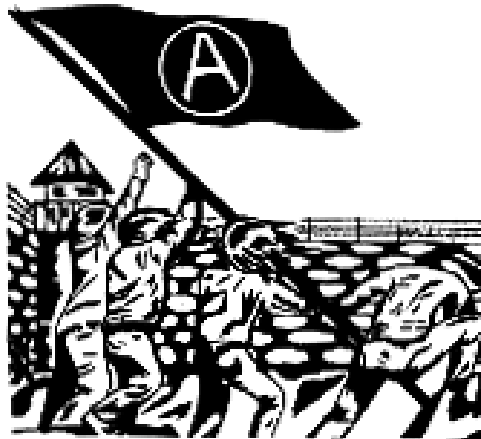
For workers needs to be fully met we must get rid of the bosses. But this is no easy task. The bosses are organised. They have the media on their side. They also have the State and the force of the army and police that go with it. The state (i.e. governments, armies, courts, police, etc.) is a direct result of the fact that we live in a class soci-

ety. A world where the 225 richest people have a combined wealth equal to the combined annual income of the world's 2.5 billion poorest people.

The state is there to protect the interests of this minority, if not by persuasion then by force. Laws are made not to protect us but to protect those who own the property.

Elections

We are led to believe that the state is run in our interests. Don't we have elections to ensure that any government not behaving itself can be brought to task? Their democracy is about ticking boxes. We are given a choice all right but between parties who all agree with the system of a tiny minority ruling the country.



Electioneering inevitably leads to revolutionaries forsaking their revolutionary principles. They go for whatever is popular and will ensure that they get elected. This becomes more important to them than educating people about the meaning of socialism. It also means that they look on the mass of voters as mere spectators. People are seen as voters, not as people who can be actually involved in politics and bringing socialism about.

Socialism cannot come through the Parliament. If we look at a country like Chile we can see why. In 1973 the people elected a moderate socialist government led by President Allende. This democratically elected government was toppled by a CIA backed military coup. Repression followed in which the workers movement was smashed and

thousands of militants lost their lives.

Central to our politics is the belief that ordinary people must make the revolution. Every member of the working class (workers, unemployed, housewives, etc.) has a role to play. Only by this participation can we ensure that anarchism is made real. We believe in a revolution that comes from the bottom up and is based on factory and community councils. Freedom cannot be given, it has to be taken.

This is where we disagree with what is called the 'revolutionary left'. While they say that they agree with all that we've said so far, they still hold to a belief that a party is necessary to make the revolution for the people. Most of them base their ideas on Lenin who believed that workers were only capable of achieving what he called "*trade union consciousness*". According to him they needed a party of professional revolutionaries to make the revolution for them. What we saw in Russia was nothing to do with socialism. Power rested in the hands of a tiny party elite. The state was the boss and the workers were still exploited and told what to do.

So we say it is up to ordinary people. Some ask: "*Is this possible? Would it not be chaotic?*" Of course not. At the moment capitalism would collapse without the support of the working class. We make everything, we produce all the wealth. It is possible to organise production so that the needs of all are met. It is also possible to create structures that allow everyone to participate in making the decisions that affect them.

Society would be based on factory and community councils. These would federate with each other so that decisions could be made covering large areas. Delegates could be sent from each area and workplace. They would be recallable, i.e. if those who voted them in are not happy with their behaviour they can immediately replace them with someone else. With the new technology it will be much easier to involve lots of people in making quick decisions.

Within this society there would be genuine individual freedom. Individuals would have to contribute to society but would be free to the extent that they do not interfere with the freedom of others. Fundamentally we believe that people are good and if they won freedom would not easily give it up or destroy it.

Anarchism in Action

Like most people who hear about Anarchism you probably believe that "it is a good set of ideas but unfortunately it would never work. People are naturally greedy and selfish, if there was no government to look after our interests there would be complete chaos".

But there are historical examples of anarchism working. The greatest of these happened in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War. It started with an attempted fascist coup. In response to the coup the workers mobilised to defeat fascism. Popular militias were formed by the unions and workers seized factories. Peasants took over land that had been abandoned by the landlords. This marked the beginning of the revolution for the Anarchists. They believed that the Civil War had to be not just a fight against fascism but also against the capitalist system that had spawned fascism in the first place.

In the zones controlled by the Anarchists, workers self-management became a reality. In Catalonia there were at least 2,000 industrial and commercial collectives. At least 60% of 'republican' Spain's agriculture was collectivised.

In the workplaces councils or "comite" elected by assemblies of workers and representing all sectors of the enterprise, were given the task of administering the collectivised factory. Collectivised enterprises in each sector of industry were represented in an Economic Federation. This in turn was topped by a General Industrial Council that would closely control the whole industry.

Here is a description of the organisation of gas, electricity and water in Barcelona.

"Each type of job (e.g. fitters) set up a section consisting of at least fifteen workers. Where there were not the numbers to do this workers from different trades got together to constitute a general section. Each section nominates two delegates that are chosen by assemblies of the workers. One of the delegates will be of a technical calibre and will participate in the 'comite' of the workplace. The other will be entrusted with the management of work in the section.

The 'comite' of the building or plant comes next. It is nominated by the delegates of the sections and consists of a technician, a manual worker and an administrator. The manual worker has to solve difficulties that might arise between different sections. He or she receives suggestions from workers in the different trades and the sections give him or her daily reports on the progress of work. Periodically the delegate calls the sections to general meetings. At these proposals and initiatives which are likely to improve production and productivity are studied as well as ones to improve the workers' situation. A copy of the deliberation is sent to the Council for Industry.

The delegates with administrative functions supervises the arrival and warehousing of materials, records requirements details with book-keeping for supplies and reserves, and keeps an eye on the state of income and expenditure. S/He also deals with correspond-

ence and it is his/her responsibility to see that balance sheets and reports addressed to the Council for Industry are prepared.

The delegate with technical functions supervises the activities of his section, and uses every endeavour to increase productivity. To lighten the workers' burden by introducing new methods. S/He checks on production at the power stations, the state of the network, prepares statistics and charts indicating how production is developing. At the summit there are the Councils of Industry. One each for gas, electricity and water. Each is composed of eight delegates, four from the U. G. T. (the socialist trade union) and four from the C.N.T. These are capped by the General Council of the three industries, which is also made up by eight delegates drawn equally from the two unions.

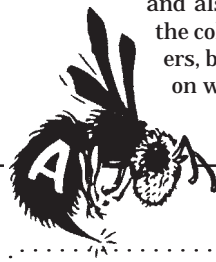
This Council co-ordinates activities of the three industries; attunes the production and distribution of raw materials from a regional, national and international point of view; modifies prices; organises general administration; indeed takes and uses all initiatives useful to production and the workers' needs. Meanwhile it is obliged at all times to submit its' activities to the scrutiny of local and regional union assemblies"

On the Land

The countryside also saw collectivisation. In Aragon, near the front-line during the war, collectivisation took root and spread like wildfire. In February 1937 there were 275 collectives totalling 80,000 members. Three months later there were 450 collectives with 180,000 members. Often the peasants and farm labourers went further than their counterparts in the towns and cities. Not only was production collectivised but in rural areas consumption too. In many of these areas money was abolished.

Usually the decision to collectivise was made at an assembly (a meeting of the entire village). It meant handing over land, livestock, tools, seed, stocks of wheat and other produce. The land was then divided into sectors, each of which was assigned to a work group of about a dozen who elected their own delegate. Produce went into the "pile" for communal consumption. Each would produce according to their ability, each would consume according to their needs.

Collectivisation did not only apply to the land. In the villages, workshops were set up where all the local trades people would produce tools, furniture, etc. for the village and also carry out repairs to the collectivists houses. Bakers, butchers, barbers and so on were also collectivised.



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The lot of rural workers and peasants was improved by the introduction of machinery. Living standards rose, in the words of one collectivist "those who had less now ate more and better - no one went short". Education became a central concern and young children who had never been to school were given the education denied to them by the landlords and their system.

Women's Action

Gains were also made by women. They were present everywhere - on committees, in the militias, in the front line. In the early battles of the war, women fought alongside men as a matter of course. It was not merely a case of women filling in for men who were away at the front. They were in the militias and fought alongside the men as equals. They were organising the collectives and taking up the fight against the sexist attitudes of the past, which have no place in any real revolution. During the war abortion was legalised in the 'republican zone'. Centres were opened for women, including unmarried mothers and prostitutes.

From all accounts there truly were changes in attitudes towards women. One female participant in the Civil War has said: "It was like being brothers and sisters. It had always annoyed me that men in this country didn't consider women as beings with full human rights. But now there was this big change. I believe it arose spontaneously out of the revolutionary movement"

The Lessons

History is not neutral. What we learn in school is the necessity for government, rulers and capitalism. What we do not learn is that many times it has been shown that this government is not necessary. People are not inherently bad. Given the right conditions a spirit of mutual aid and co-operation can grow.

History shows us that Anarchist ideas can work. A new society can be created with the workers in control. But it won't happen spontaneously - We must organise for it.

That is why we need revolutionary organisation. An organisation that draws together all those fighting for workers control. An organisation that gives us the chance to exchange ideas, experiences, and to learn from the lessons of history. An organisation that facilitates our struggle together for a new society.

We do not need a group of leaders and their passive followers. We do need an organisation working towards mobilising the masses of ordinary people in the process of making the revolution. Find out about the anarchist organisations where you live or if there are none then consider starting one.