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Thomas Giovanni
Who Are the Anarchists and What is Anarchism?
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Spanish Civil War 1936–39 Reading Guide. A detailed collection of articles on the Spanish Revolution – arguably the most far reaching revolution in history.

For A Working Class Feminism: Resources For International Women's Day. A collection of pamphlets, articles and interviews presenting a new vision of feminism.

The Bread Book. An introductory blog promoting Peter Kropotkin's classic work "The Conquest of Bread" which presents a vision of free society where everyone has access to basic needs.

to confront and undermine all systems of oppression, domination and exploitation in our communities, schools and workplaces and build alternative models and relations in the process. These seeds of the new world that we are creating through the popular power that we are building in the struggle against the oppression of the old world, must develop over time in struggle with the current systems until we have the opportunity to replace them. Such a revolution must take place if we truly believe that all human beings have equal worth, that all should have equal freedom and that we feel such a world would be a desirable place to be. The elites won't give this to us so we must fight for it against their actions and in the process of building ours. So join us — and your neighbors, coworkers, fellow students and all those of the broader working class – as we fight against domination, exploitation and oppression in the struggle towards building a better world together.

Thomas Giovanni is a member of Black Rose/Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation. Additional hyperlinks and references can be found in the original link: blackrosefed.org

Recommended Readings

"Why I Am An Anarchist" by Lorenzo Ervin Komboa. Former Black Panther and political prisoner Komboa writes on why he became an anarchist and provides a brief introduction. The full text can be found in the Black Anarchism Reader.

"The Anarchist FAQ." A two volume published and online book of questions and detailed answers covering a wide range of topics.

"Building a Revolutionary Anarchism" by Colin O'Malley. A practical program of how to make anarchism a significant force and relating to larger social movements.

In the wake of the use of militant street tactics at the Trump inauguration protests, the controversial shut down of two prominent right-wing speakers at the University of California, Berkeley, and a variety of high profile actions against the far right, anarchists have received increased media attention and sparked widespread debate, particularly around anti-fascist struggles. But many people are still confused about anarchism, associating it with indiscriminate violence, chaos, and disorder. This distorted image runs counter to more than a century of anarchist activity in and outside the United States. So if not chaos or disorder, what does anarchism stand for? What do anarchists believe in?

Core Anarchist Values

At the most basic level, anarchists believe in the equal value of all human beings. Anarchists also believe that hierarchical power relations are not only unjust, but corrupt those who have power and dehumanize those who don't. Instead anarchists believe in direct democracy, cooperation, and solidarity. Anarchists oppose the state, capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, imperialism and other forms of oppression, not because they believe in disorder; but rather because they believe in equal freedom for all and oppose all forms of exploitation, domination and hierarchy.

So if anarchists aren't for disorder and chaos, what are they for? Anarchists recognize that the current social order promotes individualistic, competitive disorder and ecological destruction, not freedom for all. For example, under capitalism the wealthy elite have the freedom to dominate and exploit the rest of us, while taking away our freedom to control our work and lives, and taking away our ability to equitably share in the globally and historically created economic and technological advances of our world. In contrast to this, anarchists support the principles of solidarity and equal freedom for all, in all aspects of society.

Direct Democracy Replaces the State

The democratic state is a contradiction in terms to anarchists. The state is not truly participatory, but rather a governance system in which some govern and others are governed. It is made up of hierarchical institutions and relations of power in which a few, elected or otherwise (rather than the whole society), make binding, value-laden decisions for the rest of us, and enforce those decisions with the direct – or underlying – threat of violence. To govern ourselves without the state, anarchists propose directly democratic assemblies with mandated (i.e. they must bring the specific views and votes of all from the assembly) and immediately recallable delegates (not "representatives" who are elected and then make their own decisions) to engage in dialogue, negotiation and compromise with larger numbers of people. For example, instead of electing senators and representatives, anarchists propose neighborhood assemblies of perhaps between 200- 400 people to discuss, debate and dialogue directly regarding the various issues that arise in our society. Clusters of neighborhoods might send their mandated delegates with specific votes on each issue to do the same for sub-regional assemblies, regional assemblies and a global assembly. If each of those four levels of directly democratic assemblies were around 300 people, you could have directly democratic self-governance of 8.1 billion people. Of course this is only a theoretical example and this could take different forms and numerical quantities in practice; but these directly democratic forms would eliminate others making decisions for the global population and instead involve directly democratic participatory decision-making of all people on the planet.

Does this mean that we'd be against administrative agencies tasked with developing scientific research or coordinating health care or educating the population? Of course not. However, the system of elite control dominating and manipulating such agencies would be eliminated. Instead, these agencies would be accountable

directly democratic, collective bottom-up action at our workplaces, schools and within our communities, we seek to force those in positions of power to make improvements in our conditions (or change the conditions directly without approval from authorities), while building the bottom-up popular power amongst the broad working class necessary for bigger gains and ultimately fundamental transformation. For example, collective direct action might involve strikes, boycotts, blockades, civil disobedience, or directly making changes without top-down approval. In addition, broader educational and organizing efforts help to build towards such action in ways that broaden struggle and consciousness. The popular power that we build is autonomous from the state, political parties or other elite or hierarchical forces, and instead represents the collective, egalitarian, directly democratic power of the broad working class in our communities, workplaces, and schools.

Prefigurative politics means that we seek to organize in a manner consistent with a society we want to live in while building popular power. We organize in a directly democratic, collective and egalitarian manner where we confront capitalism, the state and all systems of oppression both outside of and within our movements and start to plant the seeds and build the foundations of a new society through the ever increasing popular power that we build in the movements and organizations of which we are a part today. The various elite, reactionary or otherwise oppressive forces won't just allow this to happen. All of this will be a struggle that will ultimately lead to revolution — the abolition of the state, the expropriation of all the means of production from the few transferred to the control and benefit of all, and the fundamental transformation of the dominating, oppressive and exploitative systems, institutions and cultures of our world to the liberatory, free and egalitarian systems of tomorrow.

But to create such a society, anarchists believe we must begin to now operate in a manner consistent with such a society. We need

oppressive actions of individuals and groups. Transformative justice processes — developed significantly within a variety of North American indigenous cultures — could serve to hold individual transgressors accountable and attempt to prevent such actions in the future.

The Possibility of Anarchism

Is this all even possible? The farthest explicitly anarchist movements that have come to implement such a vision occurred in Manchuria from 1929–1931, Ukraine from 1917–1921 and Spain from 1936–1939. Anarchists have also built, held strong influence or were significant forces in some of the first labor movements in almost every continent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. More recently, some revolutionary libertarian[1] left societies (though not anarchist communist societies, they are in the same tendency and in line with many of the same broad libertarian left values and principles as anarchism) have also emerged in places like Chiapas, Mexico in the 1990s until present led by the Zapatistas and in Rojava, Kurdistan (Northern Syria and Iraq) from 2012 to present (while also successfully and heroically fighting ISIS forces in the process).

How do we get there? Anarchists believe in direct action, popular power and prefigurative politics. Direct action strategies mean anarchists don't try to get elected to public office (or take control of the state by other means), prioritize legal challenges in the courts to change laws, or gain management positions within businesses to change how things are run. Instead, through

[1] *"Libertarian" has historically been used as a synonym for anarchism globally. The right in the United States attempted to co-opt this term in the 1970s with the formation of the pro-capitalist, competitive, hyper individualist "Libertarian Party". This has nothing to do with anarchism or the libertarian left which is socialist, cooperative, and believes that true individuality is cultivated in the context of healthy collective relations.*

from the bottom-up through our assemblies and councils of mandated delegates and filled with voluntary cooperation amongst those active in their field just as many associations and agencies work today despite attempts at top-down governmental control.

An Egalitarian and Liberatory Global Economic Order

What about economics? All anarchists are anti-capitalists and we believe that the broad working class must end capitalism and replace it with an economic system that benefits us all. Most anarchists believe in communism (not the state dictatorships in places like the USSR, China, or Cuba led by "Communist" parties). As the term was originally used in the 19th century, to anarchists, communism instead means a stateless, classless society in which the land, machines, buildings, resources and other tools/infrastructure/locations by which and in which we engage in economic activity would be controlled from the bottom up through directly democratic assemblies of working people and mandated delegates in different coordinating roles similar to how our community assemblies would work. Specialization would likely occur, but job tasks would be divided more fairly so that work time would be reduced, work conditions would be improved and undesirable work would be eliminated or partially shared by many. The workplace would be driven by those doing the work with accountability to their local communities and the federations of communities sub-regionally, regionally and globally. The communist maxim "from each according to ability, to each according to need" means that each would be expected to contribute according to their ability in whatever capacity. Individuals would then be able to have all of their needs met (health, education, housing, transportation, food, clothing, etc.) and many of their wants met (entertainment, luxury items) on an egalitarian basis.

Unlike some historically top-down models, a bottom-up participatory economy would encourage diversity of production of goods and services for the diverse needs and wants of individuals. But all individuals would be given the opportunity to develop their skills and abilities according to their capacities, talents and desires so that they contribute in the most fulfilling and productive way possible to society. However, not all would be expected to work for the society (retirees, school-age children, parents on parental leave, those with incapacitating health issues, etc.). Different types and levels of societal work would be expected from single individuals vs. parents, or those differently-abled vs. others. Fulfilling differentiated levels of expected contribution would not mean differentiated levels of compensation. All needs and wants would be fulfilled in an egalitarian manner that doesn't disadvantage someone because they have greater needs (such as health needs or requirements for their children) All in all, instead of a society basing social prestige on acquiring things, social prestige would turn towards those who contribute to society in meaningful ways according to their individual capacities.

Also the economy would be a global economy that seeks to develop and utilize the capacities, talents and skills of all for the benefit of all. This would involve a commitment to international solidarity and the sharing of technology, resources and knowledge to undo the historically, economically, politically and socially created inequalities of our world. Allowing for all to achieve their potential by providing the resources, opportunities and connections to do so will generate profound advances as we unlock the capacities of so many currently unable to contribute to their full capacities. This means the movement which we build must be global. However, revolutionary social change would likely be uneven due to gains in some areas and setbacks in others as we build connections around the globe to fight alongside each other and undermine reactionary, elite and oppressive forces led by those affected most directly by them.

The Elimination of Societal Oppression

Beyond politics and economics, there are still vast inequalities and dominating power relations that affect our world. Systems and cultures of white supremacy, religious prejudice, patriarchy, heterosexism, xenophobia, and many other forms of oppression still dominate our world. The destruction of these institutions, systems and oppressive elements of cultures is central to the anarchist vision. These systems must be destroyed and replaced with egalitarian relations that prioritize respect, liberation, solidarity, diversity and autonomy within various communities that allows for people to be free and fully human in a manner in which they choose as long as it doesn't involve the domination, oppression or exploitation of others.

What about policing, anti-social behavior, and crimes? The overwhelming majority of anti-social behaviors and crimes are due to structural inequalities under capitalism and other systems of socio-economic oppression. Another strong contributing factor to anti-social behavior and crimes relates to inadequate mental health services. Under an anarchist communist society, the vast majority of the incentive for and causes for crime would be removed. However, remnants of anti-social, violent and oppressive behavior would persist. Anarchism doesn't support the freedom of some to exploit, oppress or harm others — it's not a competitive bullying free-for-all like capitalism. Instead, anarchism is fundamentally about eliminating dominating and oppressive relations of power. This wouldn't involve a specialized institution like the police, which consolidates too much repressive power in the hands of too few, leading to corruption, abuse and entrenched dominating sites of hierarchical power. Instead, organized, broad-based and rotating community patrols and rapid response networks — aided by a heightened sense of societal solidarity, familiarity and engagement amongst neighbors under anarchist communism — would work to defend against reactionary, anti-social or other