

# Society against the State

Libertarian is synonymous of anarchist

Acacio Augusto, Camila Jourdan

18 August 2019

The word anarchy was initially mobilized in modern politics by the literature of contract and natural justice. Life without government, for authors such as Thomas Hobbes or Jean Jacques Rousseau, was wilderness, brutality, arbitrary, chaos. It will be Pierre Joseph Proudhon who, for the first time, will reverse this understanding of the word anarchy, using it to name his propositions in the classic book, of 1840, "What is property? or Researches on the Principle and Constitution of the Law of Nations". For him, anarchy is order. This is the paradox derived from the political mobilization of workers in the 19th century, which would later be called libertarian socialism at the time of the First International Workers Association (IWA of 1864). Modern anarchy, whether as a social movement or analytical elaboration, is born as a simultaneous critique of the property regime (capitalism) and the systems of government (statism), its literal meaning being the absence of government. Proudhon also emphasizes a critique of the direction of consciences, which depends not only on anarchist anticlericalism, but also on the refusal to present himself as the enlightened vanguard of the workers, guiding them to revolution. Something that appears both in Proudhon's correspondence with Karl Marx, as well as in the heated controversies of the latter with Mikhail Bakunin within the IWA.

It's been more than 150 years of history of struggles, experiences, experiments, proposals, analyses. All of this is amply documented in books, research work inside and outside universities all over the planet, archives kept by activists and/or researchers, memories and images. Anarchism and anarchisms go through modern history until today in association with diverse political, social and cultural struggles: the workers movement and trade unionism, the struggle against fascism and the opposition to the war of nations, the invention of free educational practices and a broad libertarian culture, the countering of state terror of all hues, women's liberty and feminisms, the radical opposition to racism, the youth movements in post-World War II, ecology, the struggles against colonialism. Today, anarchy is still visible in contemporary anti-capitalist struggles, from the anti-globalization movement at the end of the 20th century to current protests such as the mobilizations against austerity policies in Greece (since 2008), Occupy Wall Street (2011) in the USA, the Indignados movement in Spain (2011) and the June 2013 in Brazil, among others.

In spite of the historical, social and cultural relevance that anarchy and anarchisms have always had in modern politics, it is not uncommon either in the media, or in the imagination of

the common sense, the representation of anarchists as dangerous and inconsequential terrorists, even in left-wing cycles portrayed as petty bourgeoisie carriers of a “children’s disease”; or as something of young idealists who still do not possess a pragmatic reading of reality. Even in specialized areas of the Human Sciences, anarchist thought is often distorted or belittled as something pre-political or lacking in complexity. In short, whether in the common sense, in science or in the so-called political ideologies (to the right and to the left wings), anarchy has always been viewed as a foreign force. In the last 40 years, however, academic works from all over the world and from diverse areas of knowledge (from theoretical physics to political science) are demonstrating that this strange force is a powerful perspective of interpellation of reality; and from the historical-political perspective, the post-Cold War context with the current systemic crisis of democracies is showing that the criticisms of the so-called classical anarchism to both Soviet socialism and global capitalism are being confirmed one by one.

Now, once again, political forces intervene, this time not to disqualify anarchists, but in an effort to appropriate part of their ideas and words. Recently the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* published an article by Fábio Zanini<sup>1</sup> that presents the growth of groups and intellectuals calling themselves anarcho-capitalists or libertarians. With references to libertarianism or ordoliberalism, derived from the praxeology of the Austrian School and the so-called American ultra-libertarians. As libertarian researchers we have reasons to consider this perspective of thought anachronistic and inaccurate. This could be argued by the history of anarchism itself, as shown above. The association of anarchisms, the absence of State as absence of government, with ultraliberalism is an undue appropriation of theoretical elements outside the context in which they were developed, which leaves aside characteristics that can be considered essential to the currents of thought in question. To the extent that such characteristics are disregarded or subtly obliterated, we have a change of meaning that generates a conceptual confusion capable of even approaching antagonistic perspectives as if they were close or of completely emptied the meaning of the notions in question. Anarchy emerges in history as anti-capitalist, a form of socialism that considers that the total liberation of workers would only be possible with the end of the State. Social equality, as the end of classes and oppression, would only be complete with the end of political hierarchies, of which the State would be the main expression and source of maintenance of political hierarchies, of which the State would be the main expression and source of maintenance. This involves understanding that the State and capitalism are intimately related and mutually maintained in modernity. The modern state is nothing more than the expression of economic development after the industrial revolution, and politics and the economy would not be separate, but two sides of the same coin. This also means that equality and freedom are not antagonistic or different concepts, but complementary.

There is no equality without freedom, nor freedom without equality. It is not possible to have a society without classes and the State, on the one hand; nor the absence of political hierarchies and oppressions with social and economic inequality, on the other.

In this sense, to understand the perspective of the analysis of militants who developed the libertarian tradition of thought consists, precisely, in exposing how the State and capitalism go together in modern history. Thus, anarcho-capitalism makes no sense, since to defend the pri-

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<sup>1</sup> Fábio Zanini. “Quem são os libertários e anarcocapitalistas, que pregam o fim do Estado”. In: *Folha de S. Paulo*. Ilustríssima. 04 August 2019. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/2019/08/quem-sao-os-libertarios-e-anarcocapitalistas-que-pregam-o-fim-do-estado.shtml>.

macy of capital is already to defend a type of State and to really defend social equality is already to want liberty and, with it, the end of hierarchies and of any form of state organization. The association between anarchy and capitalism or the absence of the State and the maintenance of property, private or state, can only be a misconception or incomprehension of the forms of both. As Proudhon puts it, to political federalism corresponds economic mutualism, that is anarchy or self-management. The identification between socialism and centralized state organization largely equated to the planned economy is rooted in a certain reading of Marx and in the experience of the USSR, but is foreign to any form of anarchism. The main experiences of social organization aiming at the revolutionary transformation of society pass through self-management or workers councils that dismiss state and/or private management, as well as any hierarchical political power. To disregard this is to obliterate the very history of revolutionary experiences and social organizations. Even today, when we try to exemplify effective libertarian experiences, in order to say that we are not talking here of unrealistic utopias, we can cite the Zapatista experience in Mexico, whose autonomous territories are organized in a federalist libertarian manner without the State and in a communal way, as well as the libertarian confederalism of Rojava, in territory with a majority of the population of the country.

What, then, would ultraliberalism be? First of all, the minimal state is a theoretical fiction. State is an elementary political reason that is difficult to measure in intensity. There is no such thing as less State, just as a woman is not less pregnant. In addition, as already mentioned, politics and economics are not separated and, thus, economic power has always been and always will be political power. Given this fact, it makes no sense to think of a more horizontal society with a radicalization of inequalities. What we have, in fact, is an increase in the political power of certain corporations that play very well the role of the State (even if they do not receive this name, the words are not the things). They can substitute for the State, fulfilling the same function as it, or is the State nothing more than an expression (an armed wing?) of this economic power, which in practice does not make that much difference. It is not by chance that the supporters of the supposed anarcho-capitalism, which is not anarcho at all, affirm that the police and juridical apparatus would be the last to be altered. And here they join their state antagonists, the Leninists, who believe that the State would be gradually defined, after the correction of inequalities by means of a plan. The ultraliberal State is, like all States, the police State. This is also one of the reasons why there has never been capitalism without the State, nor the State without capitalism. The attempt, right or left, to abolish one, without abolishing the other, will always end in the restoration of one of the parts.

With the growth of the social conflicts, proper to the growth of inequality, the police state, today, is evident in the center as well as in the periphery of global capitalism. The principle of the State is the principle of ownership, the State is the ownership of a territory that replaces the community of this one, replaces at the same time that places it in its custody. The Liberland, quoted from the matter, is nothing more than a micro-state or a micro-enterprise, which gives in the same. Exposed this, we also see how it would be anachronistic to speak in capitalism without State; it is the same contradiction involved when speaking in capitalism without property. But can this State at least not intervene in the economy? Now, this is also false. If we know that politics and economy are two sides of the same coin, it is always intervening also in the economy maintaining economic inequality. Only sometimes this intervention is not evident. But it is important to emphasize that it is even “just sometimes”, because in recent major economic

crises (since 2008), when large financial institutions were under threat, state intervention needed to be direct in support of these institutions, which we know will be repeated as often as necessary.

Hence, it makes no sense to speak of anarchy with capitalism, since anarchism is based on the equivalence between liberty and equality. This occurs not in a society *without the* State, but in a society *against* the State. That is, organized in such a way as to prevent political power from establishing social and economic privileges, as the anthropologist Pierre Clastres observed among the Amerindian peoples of our continent. A horizontal society, without hierarchical institutions, incompatible with the social- political-economic differences that constitute capitalism. At the same time, there cannot be capitalism without the State, since the maintenance of private ownership of the means of production, reproduction and maintenance of life immediately institutes the state form in the social sphere. Corporations, companies, the very form of merchandising that has invaded all areas of our existence, are nothing more than micro- states propagated by society. The State arises with the hierarchical organization that establishes inequalities in access to the means of production and reproduction of life. What capitalism seems to abolish is precisely the horizontal collectivity that the State supposedly replaces. In this sense, capitalism is the State-form par excellence. To be anti-capitalist is to be, first of all, anti-state.

It remains that the trend among neoliberals who call themselves anarcho- capitalists is just that, one fashion trend. It has no historical, theoretical or material consistency. When very much it is configured in more a thematic that seeks to neutralize the critique and radical practices of anarchists who take as a simultaneous target of their struggles the State and the Market. In time: it should be noted that as capitalists who call themselves libertarians are practicing the essential activity of the owners, outlined by Proudhon in 1840: theft. The word libertarian, forged by the anarchist poet Joseph Déjacque, was taken up again by Sebatién Faure and Louise Michel to name the journal they created at the end of the 19th century, when being called as anarchist meant risking of death due to the resurgence of repression in the Paris Commune (1871) and the current Process of the Thirty, when Piotr Kropotkin was arrested. Therefore, anarchist and libertarian are synonyms. It is dishonest to use the word to name precisely what the anarchist struggles have been fighting for more than a century and a half.

Words are not sterile representations of reality, they are the object and result of struggles. At a time when the so-called ultra-liberalism is triumphant all over the planet, occupying positions in the bureaucracies of ultra-conservative governments that flirt with the historical forms of fascism, to see a part of this conservatism seeking to appropriate the word libertarianism only shows that the struggle of anarchists makes them tremble for their privileges. Let them take refuge, then, in the inhospitable Liberland, because we know that the darkest hour of the night is that which precedes the most radiant morning.

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**Note:** Text originally published in 2019 in the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper about the appropriation of the words anarchism and libertarianism by self-called anarcho-capitalist groups. Once again, the misuse of words is being spread by the media, now as a result of the latest rise of a fascist ultra-right-wing government of Javier Milei in Argentina. Anarcho-capitalism is not only a contradiction in terms but also the cowardly appropriation of words forged over 150 years ago to affirm anti-capitalist and anti-state struggles and experiences. Furthermore, the minimal state and the spontaneous market are theories emptied of reality that not only don't presuppose the

decentralization of power but reinforce the social war for the expansion of economic inequalities and the policing of society.

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