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Anarcha-Feminism – Thinking about Anarchism

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An important principle of anarchism and one that more than any other differentiates it from other types of socialism is its emphasis on freedom and non-hierarchical social relations.

Central to anarchism is the rejection of any power hierarchy between men and women. Anarchists believe that the liberty of one is based on the liberty of all and so there can be no true anarchist society without an end to all existing structures of domination and exploitation, including naturally the oppression of women. As anarchists we believe that the means determines the end. This means that we do not wait for some future revolution to tackle the problems of sexism but instead see that it is important to struggle against it in the here and now. As anarchists we strive to ensure that both our own organisations and also those campaigns we are involved in are free from sexism and power-hierarchies and that all members have equal decision-making power.

We recognise that the full participation of women within the anarchist movement and social struggles of today is very important. In order to shape the future society women must be involved in

its creation and, of course, without the participation of half of the population there will be no social revolution. Just as we believe the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class themselves, we also see that, essentially, women's development, freedom and independence must come from themselves. Becoming involved in political struggle is in itself an act of empowerment. Many women in today's society do not believe that they could have a role in fundamentally changing things. However by getting involved, by assuming our place — agitating, educating and organising — we begin to take control of our own lives in the process of actively fighting to change the unjust society in which we live.

Only in an anarchist society will the basis for the oppression of women cease to exist. This is because women, due to their reproductive role, will always be more vulnerable than men in capitalist society which is based on the need to maximise profit. Abortion rights, paid maternity leave, crèche and childcare facilities etc., in short everything that would be necessary to ensure the economic equality of women under capitalism, will always be especially relevant to women. Because of this, women are generally viewed as being less economical than men to employ and are more susceptible to attacks on gains such as crèche facilities etc.

Also, women cannot be free until they have full control over their own bodies. Yet under capitalism, abortion rights are never guaranteed. Even if gains are made in this area they can be attacked, as happens with abortion rights in the USA. The oppression of women under capitalism has thus an economic and sexual basis. From these root causes of women's oppression, stem other forms of oppression like, for example, the ideological oppression of women, violence against women etc. That is not to say that sexist ideas will just disappear with the end of capitalism, but rather only with the end of capitalism can we rid society of an institutional bias that continues to propagate and encourage sexism.

As an anarchist society will not be driven by profit, there, for example, will be no economic penalty for having children or wanting to spend more time with them. Childcare, housework etc., can be seen as the responsibility of the whole of society and thus give women and men more options in general.

Anarchism/Anarcha-feminism¹ joins the fight against class exploitation and that against women's oppression together. True freedom, both for women and men, can only come about in a classless society, where workplaces are self-managed, private property is abolished and the people who make decisions are those affected by them.

Clearly the struggle for women's freedom requires a class struggle by the workers. And in turn, the class struggle can only be successful if it is at the same time a struggle against women's oppression.

¹ Anarchism and anarcha-feminism are the same thing — anarcha-feminism just emphasises the feminism that is inherent to anarchism.