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The Anarchist Revolution

Interview with Murray Bookchin

Dena Clamage, Murray Bookchin

1969

Murray Bookchin is the editor of *Anarchos* magazine, a periodically appearing journal of anarchist thought published in New York City. Copies of his magazine and other writings are available from Anarchos, P.O. Box 466, Peter Stuyvesant Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10009 or may be picked up in person only at the Fifth Estate office.

This interview was conducted for the *Fifth Estate* by Dena Clamage.

Fifth Estate: What is meant by anarchism? Why talk about anarchism today?

Murray Bookchin: Most people associate anarchists with traditional bomb-throwers and nonsense like that. Anarchism is something much larger than a particular set or a particular school.

Some thousands of years ago men lived in some kind of totality with nature. They were dominated by the natural world, but they also lived in harmony with the natural world.

Then there was a tremendous cleavage. Man's attempts to free himself from the domination of the natural world, to gain

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some type of security, resulted in the domination of man by man. It split man from nature, it split man from man, it brought about class society. It not only split man from man, it split man internally. It split his mind from his body. It split the concept of subject from object. It produced a whole logic of domination.

During this whole period in which man dominated man there was a gradual development of the technological forces. Slowly, bit by bit, in the course of this class society, in the course of this propertied society, man began to develop his technology.

And for the first time over these thousands of years it's possible to see a unity restored again between man and nature, between man and man in which man will not so much dominate nature but will be secure, will be able to shape the natural world consciously.

Anarchism has always been a libidinal movement on the part of mankind to go back to that unity.

During all periods of great transition the masses of people have pressed against the system of domination that existed. They have seen it crumbling. They pressed against it and tried to restore this nonauthoritarian, free world. But they haven't had the material conditions, the technology, to consolidate this. There has always been scarcity, always want. And the technology has opened up an entirely new vista of human liberation.

We're sort of returning to the old communism now but with an entirely new level, an entirely new possibility, an entirely new potential for human freedom. This potential can not only eliminate property, but might eliminate toil itself, might eliminate all those things which have kept man impoverished and divided between himself and the natural world. And this is what anarchism really means.

Anarchism is an attempt to restore the early unity but now on an entirely new level. For this reason we use the word anarchy as a synthesis of these entirely new historical and social possibilities.

Fifth Estate: What are the prospects of anarchy in the United States? How could anarchy come about?

Murray Bookchin: This is the country above all in which you have the highest development of this technology. What is happening right now is this: Throughout the course of history these classes, the systems of class domination, while they dominated mankind still played a certain social function. The city played a certain social function. The split between town and country played a certain social function. It has also been said that the State played a certain social function.

Class domination, according to Marx in particular, was supposed to have made it possible for mankind to develop a culture, to develop the science necessary to free himself from the domination of nature over man. The theory here is that the ruling classes, despite all the crimes that they inflict on humanity, nonetheless, had the leisure time to develop a literature, to develop mathematics, to develop a technology.

The city also has been described as the arena in which human culture developed. Men were brought together, removed from the land and brought into close proximity with each other to communicate ideas.

The State, despite the fact that it's always been an instrument of class domination according to Marx, has played the role of maintaining a certain amount of social peace.

These institutions have played a progressive role. Whether they did or not, the most striking thing that has happened is that now they all play a totally regressive role.

The State mobilizes the means of production in order to enforce the system of domination at a time when this could be eliminated. The economy is being used to impose domination, and to preserve domination; in fact, to preserve scarcity today artificially. The armaments industry is the most striking case in point here.

We have a tremendous productive capacity, but this productive capacity does not return to the people, it is not used to sup-

port them or to emancipate them. It is used to preserve scarcity artificially so that people have to go to work even when work is unnecessary.

The city today plays a totally regressive role. It no longer unifies people or brings them together. On the contrary, in the large cities today people are more alienated than ever before. This is an entirely new development historically. The city is no longer conceived as the arena of culture but as the arena of deculturation.

The contradiction between town and country has produced an enormous ecological crisis today. The city crawls over the land in the most destructive fashion. It is the center of air pollution, the arena in which most of the poisons are introduced into the human environment. And here again you have a very striking departure from all of the past.

Technology which should free men from toil actually becomes a means of imprisoning man. We have technological developments which are entirely destructive, which are entirely coercive.

The result is that you have a total exhaustion of all institutions, of time-honored property society. They no longer play even the progressive role that Marx imputed to them.

What is happening in the United States? Here more than any place else in the world we sense this. We sense on the one hand the enormous technological possibilities even if we sense them unconsciously. We sense on the other hand a condition that exists, a prevailing condition which imprisons man. The tension between what-could-be and what-is is now becoming excruciating in the United States.

A whole generation has emerged which senses this tension almost intuitively, and some people sense this consciously. The result is that you have a tremendous polarization of the new generation which has not been able to justify in its own mind the dominating role, sexually, psychologically, politically, institutionally, of all those forces which men in the past accepted.