

Post-Left Anarchy

Leaving the Left Behind

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Prologue to Post-Left Anarchy

It is now nearly a decade and a half since the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is seven years since Bob Black first sent me the manuscript for his book, *Anarchy after Leftism*, published in 1997. It's over four years since I asked *Anarchy* magazine Contributing Editors to participate in a discussion of "post-left anarchy" which ultimately appeared in the Fall/Winter 1999–2000 issue of the magazine (#48). And it's also one year since I first wrote and published "Post-Left Anarchy: Rejecting the Reification of Revolt," which appeared in the Fall/Winter 2002–2003 issue (#54) of *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*.

Aside from creating a hot new topic for debate in anarchist and leftist periodicals, web sites and e-mail lists, one can legitimately ask what has been accomplished by introducing the term and the debate to the anarchist, and more generally radical, milieu? In response I'd say that the reaction continues to grow, and the promise of post-left anarchy primarily lies in what appears to be a continually brightening future.

One of the most troubling problems of the contemporary anarchist milieu has been the frequent fixation on attempts to recreate the struggles of the past as though nothing significant has changed since 1919, 1936, or at best 1968. Partly this is a function of the long-prevalent anti-intellectualism amongst many anarchists. Partly it's a result of the historical eclipse of the anarchist movement following the victory of Bolshevik state communism and the (self-) defeat of the Spanish Revolution. And partly it is because the vast majority of the most important anarchist theorists — like Godwin, Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Malatesta — come from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The void in the development of anarchist theory since the rebirth of the milieu in the 1960s has yet to be filled by any adequate new formulation of theory and practice powerful enough to end the impasse and catch the imaginations of the majority of contemporary anarchists in a similar manner to Bakunin's or Kropotkin's formulations in the nineteenth century.

Since the 1960s the originally minuscule — but since that time, ever-growing — anarchist milieu has been influenced (at least in passing) by the Civil Rights Movement, Paul Goodman, SDS, the Yippies, the anti-Vietnam War movement, Fred Woodworth, the Marxist New Left, the Situationist International, Sam Dolgoff and Murray Bookchin, the single-issue movements (anti-racist, feminist, anti-nuclear, anti-imperialist, environmental/ecological, animal rights, etc.), Noam Chomsky, Freddie Perlman, George Bradford/David Watson, Bob Black, Hakim Bey, Earth First! and Deep Ecology, neo-Paganism and New Ageism, the anti-globalization movement, and many others. Yet these various influences over the last forty years, both non-anarchist and anarchist alike, have failed to bring to the fore any inspiring new synthesis of critical and practical theory. A few anarchists, most notably Murray Bookchin and the Love & Rage project, have tried and failed miserably in attempting to meld the extremely diverse and idiosyncratic anarchist milieu into a genuinely new movement with a commonly-held theory. I would argue that in our current situation this is a project guaranteed to fail no matter who attempts it.

The alternative argued for by the post-left anarchist synthesis is still being created. It cannot be claimed by any single theorist or activist because it's a project that was in the air long before it started becoming a concrete set of proposals, texts and interventions. Those seeking to promote the synthesis have been primarily influenced by both the classical anarchist movement up to the Spanish Revolution on the one hand, and several of the most promising critiques and modes of intervention developed since the 60s. The most important critiques involved include those of

everyday life and the spectacle, of ideology and morality, of industrial technology, of work and of civilization. Modes of intervention focus on the concrete deployment of direct action in all facets of life. Rather than aiming at the construction of institutional or bureaucratic structures, these interventions aim at maximal critical effectiveness with minimal compromise in constantly changing networks of action.

Clearly these new critiques and modes of intervention are largely incompatible with both the old left of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and most of the New Left of the 60s and 70s. And just as clearly they are engaging a growing number of anarchists who gravitate to them because they seem to be much more congruent with the global situation we find ourselves in today than the old theories and tactics of leftism. If anarchism doesn't change to address the lived realities of the twenty-first century — by leaving the outmoded politics and organizational fetishism of leftism behind — its relevance will dissipate and the opportunities for radical contestation now so apparent will slowly vanish. Post-left anarchy is most simply a rubric through which many thoughtful contemporary anarchists would like to see the most vital of the new critiques and modes of intervention coalesce in an increasingly coherent and effective movement, which genuinely promotes unity in diversity, the complete autonomy of individuals and local groups in struggle, and the organic growth of levels of organization which don't hold back our collective energies, spontaneity and creativity.

Introduction

Anarchist critiques of leftism have a history nearly as long as the term “left” has had a political meaning. The early anarchist movement emerged from many of the same struggles as other socialist movements (which made up a major part of the political left), from which it eventually differentiated itself. The anarchist movement and other socialist movements were primarily a product of the social ferment which gave rise to the Age of Revolutions — introduced by the English, American and French Revolutions. This was the historical period in which early capitalism was developing through the enclosure of commons to destroy community self-sufficiency, the industrialization of production with a factory system based on scientific techniques, and the aggressive expansion of the commodity market economy throughout the world. But the anarchist idea has always had deeper, more radical and more holistic implications than mere socialist criticism of the exploitation of labor under capitalism. This is because the anarchist idea springs from both the social ferment of the Age of Revolutions and the critical imagination of individuals seeking the abolition of every form of social alienation and domination.

The anarchist idea has an indelibly individualist foundation upon which its social critiques stand, always and everywhere proclaiming that only free individuals can create a free, unalienated society. Just as importantly, this individualist foundation has included the idea that the exploitation or oppression of any individual diminishes the freedom and integrity of all. This is quite unlike the collectivist ideologies of the political left, in which the individual is persistently devalued, denigrated or denied in both theory and practice — though not always in the ideological window dressing that is meant only to fool the naive. It is also what prevents genuine anarchists from taking the path of authoritarians of the left, right and center who casually employ mass exploitation, mass oppression and frequently mass imprisonment or murder to capture, protect and expand their holds on political and economic power.

Because anarchists understand that only people freely organizing themselves can create free communities, they refuse to sacrifice individuals or communities in pursuit of the kinds of power that would inevitably prevent the emergence of a free society. But given the almost mutual origins of the anarchist movement and the socialist left, as well as their historical battles to seduce or capture the support of the international workers movement by various means, it isn't surprising that over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries socialists have often adopted aspects of anarchist theory or practice as their own, while even more anarchists have adopted aspects of leftist theory and practice into various left-anarchist syntheses. This is despite the fact that in the worldwide struggles for individual and social freedom the political left has everywhere proven itself either a fraud or a failure in practice. Wherever the socialist left has been successful in organizing and taking power it has at best reformed (and rehabilitated) capitalism or at worst instituted new tyrannies, many with murderous policies — some of genocidal proportions.

Thus, with the stunning international disintegration of the political left following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the time is now past due for all anarchists to reevaluate every compromise that has been or continues to be made with the fading remnants of leftism. Whatever usefulness there might have been in the past for anarchists to make compromises with leftism is evaporating with the progressive disappearance of the left from even token opposition to the fundamental institutions of capitalism: wage labor, market production, and the rule of value.

Leftists in the Anarchist Milieu

The rapid slide of the political left from the stage of history has increasingly left the international anarchist milieu as the only revolutionary anti-capitalist game in town. As the anarchist milieu has mushroomed in the last decade, most of its growth has come from disaffected youth attracted to its increasingly visible, lively and iconoclastic activities and media. But a significant minority of that growth has also come from former leftists who have — sometimes slowly and sometimes suspiciously swiftly — decided that anarchists might have been right in their critiques of political authority and the state all along. Unfortunately, not all leftists just fade away — or change their spots — overnight. Most of the former leftists entering the anarchist milieu inevitably bring with them many of the conscious and unconscious leftist attitudes, prejudices, habits and assumptions that structured their old political milieus. Certainly, not all of these attitudes, habits and assumptions are necessarily authoritarian or anti-anarchist, but just as clearly many are.

Part of the problem is that many former leftists tend to misunderstand anarchism only as a form of anti-statist leftism, ignoring or downplaying its indelibly individualist foundation as irrelevant to social struggles. Many simply don't understand the huge divide between a self-organizing movement seeking to abolish every form of social alienation and a merely political movement seeking to reorganize production in a more egalitarian form. While others do understand the divide quite well, but seek to reform the anarchist milieu into a political movement anyway, for various reasons. Some former leftists do this because they consider the abolition of social alienation unlikely or impossible; some because they remain fundamentally opposed to any individualist (or sexual, or cultural, etc.) component of social theory and practice. Some cynically realize that they will never achieve any position of power in a genuinely anarchist movement and opt for building more narrowly political organizations with more room for manipulation. Still others, unused to autonomous thinking and practice, simply feel anxious and

uncomfortable with many aspects of the anarchist tradition and wish to push those aspects of leftism within the anarchist milieu that help them feel less threatened and more secure — so that they can continue to play their former roles of cadre or militant, just without an explicitly authoritarian ideology to guide them.

In order to understand current controversies within the anarchist milieu, anarchists need to remain constantly aware — and carefully critical — of all this. Ad hominem attacks within the anarchist milieu are nothing new, and most often a waste of time, because they substitute for rational criticism of people's actual positions. (Too often rational criticism of positions is simply ignored by those unable to argue for their own positions, whose only recourse is to wild or irrelevant accusations or attempted smears.) But there remains an important place for ad hominem criticism addressed to people's chosen identities, especially when these identities are so strong that they include sedimented, often unconscious, layers of habits, prejudices and dependencies. These habits, prejudices and dependencies — leftist or otherwise — all constitute highly appropriate targets for anarchist criticism.

Recuperation and the Left-Wing of Capital

Historically, the vast majority of leftist theory and practice has functioned as a loyal opposition to capitalism. Leftists have been (often vociferously) critical of particular aspects of capitalism, but always ready to reconcile themselves with the broader international capitalist system whenever they've been able to extract a bit of power, partial reforms — or sometimes, just the vague promise of partial reforms. For this reason leftists have often been quite justifiably criticized (by both ultra-leftists and by anarchists) as the left wing of capital.

It's not just a problem that those leftists who claim to be anti-capitalist don't really mean it, although some have consciously used such lies to gain positions of power for themselves in opposition movements. The major problem is that leftists have incomplete, self-contradictory theories about capitalism and social change. As a result their practice always tends towards the recuperation (or co-optation and reintegration) of social rebellion. Always with a focus on organization, leftists use a variety of tactics in their attempts to reify and mediate social struggles — representation and substitution, imposition of collectivist ideologies, collectivist moralism, and ultimately repressive violence in one form or another. Typically, leftists have employed all of these tactics in the most unrepentantly heavy-handed and explicitly authoritarian of ways. But these tactics (except for the last) can also be — and have often been — employed in more subtle, less-overtly authoritarian ways as well, the most important examples for our purposes being the historical and present practices of many (but not all) left anarchists.

Reification is often most generally described as “thingification.” It's the reduction of a complex, living process to a frozen, dead or mechanical collection of objects or actions. Political mediation (a form of practical reification) is the attempt to intervene in conflicts as a third-party arbiter or representative. Ultimately these are the definitive characteristics of all leftist theory and practice. Leftism always involves the reification and mediation of social revolt, while consistent anarchists reject this reification of revolt. The formulation of post-left anarchy is an attempt to help make this rejection of the reification of revolt more consistent, widespread and self-aware than it already is.

Anarchy as a Theory & Critique of Organization

One of the most fundamental principles of anarchism is that social organization must serve free individuals and free groups, not vice versa. Anarchy cannot exist when individuals or social groups are dominated – whether that domination is facilitated and enforced by outside forces or by their own organization.

For anarchists the central strategy of would-be revolutionaries has been the non-mediating (anti-authoritarian, often informal or minimalist) self-organization of radicals (based on affinity and/or specific theoretical/practical activities) in order to encourage and participate in the self-organization of popular rebellion and insurrection against capital and state in all their forms. Even among most left anarchists there has always been at least some level of understanding that mediating organizations are at best highly unstable and unavoidably open to recuperation, requiring constant vigilance and struggle to avoid their complete recuperation.

But for all leftists (including left anarchists), on the other hand, the central strategy is always expressly focused on creating mediating organizations between capital & state on the one side and the mass of disaffected, relatively powerless people on the other. Usually these organizations have been focused on mediating between capitalists and workers or between the state and the working class. But many other mediations involving opposition to particular institutions or involving interventions among particular groups (social minorities, subgroups of the working class, etc.) have been common.

These mediating organizations have included political parties, syndicalist unions, mass political organizations, front groups, single-issue campaign groups, etc. Their goals are always to crystallize and congeal certain aspects of the more general social revolt into set forms of ideology and congruent forms of activity. The construction of formal, mediating organizations always and necessarily involves at least some levels of:

- **Reductionism** (Only particular aspects of the social struggle are included in these organizations. Other aspects are ignored, invalidated or repressed, leading to further and further compartmentalization of the struggle. Which in turn facilitates manipulation by elites and their eventual transformation into purely reformist lobbying societies with all generalized, radical critique emptied out.)
- **Specialization or Professionalism** (Those most involved in the day-to-day operation of the organization are selected – or self-selected – to perform increasingly specialized roles within the organization, often leading to an official division between leaders and led, with gradations of power and influence introduced in the form of intermediary roles in the evolving organizational hierarchy.)
- **Substitutionism** (The formal organization increasingly becomes the focus of strategy and tactics rather than the people-in-revolt. In theory and practice, the organization tends to be progressively substituted for the people, the organization's leadership – especially if it has become formal – tends to substitute itself for the organization as a whole, and eventually a maximal leader often emerges who ends up embodying and controlling the organization.)
- **Ideology** (The organization becomes the primary subject of theory with individuals assigned roles to play, rather than people constructing their own self-theories. All but the

most self-consciously anarchistic formal organizations tend to adapt some form of collectivist ideology, in which the social group at some level is acceded to have more political reality than the free individual. Wherever sovereignty lies, there lies political authority; if sovereignty is not dissolved into each and every person it always requires the subjugation of individuals to a group in some form.)

All anarchist theories of self-organization, on the contrary, call for (in various ways and with different emphases):

- **Individual and Group Autonomy with Free Initiative** (The autonomous individual is the fundamental basis of all genuinely anarchistic theories of organization, for without the autonomous individual, any other level of autonomy is impossible. Freedom of initiative is likewise fundamental for both individuals and groups. With no higher powers comes the ability and necessity for all decisions to be made at their point of immediate impact. As a side note, post-structuralists or postmodernists who deny the existence of the autonomous anarchist individual most often mistake the valid critique of the metaphysical subject to imply that even the process of lived subjectivity is a complete fiction — a self-deluded perspective which would make social theory impossible and unnecessary.)
- **Free Association** (Association is never free if it is forced. This means that people are free to associate with anyone in any combination they wish, and to dissociate or refuse association as well.)
- **Refusal of Political Authority, and thus of Ideology** (The word “anarchy” literally means no rule or no ruler. No rule and no ruler both mean there is no political authority above people themselves, who can and should make all of their own decisions however they see fit. Most forms of ideology function to legitimate the authority of one or another elite or institution to make decisions for people, or else they serve to delegitimize people’s own decision-making for themselves.)
- **Small, Simple, Informal, Transparent and Temporary Organization** (Most anarchists agree that small face-to-face groups allow the most complete participation with the least amount of unnecessary specialization. The most simply structured and least complex organizations leave the least opportunity for the development of hierarchy and bureaucracy. Informal organization is the most protean and most able to continually adapt itself to new conditions. Open and transparent organization is the most easily understood and controlled by its members. The longer organizations exist the more susceptible they usually become to the development of rigidity, specialization and eventually hierarchy. Organizations have life spans, and it is rare that any anarchist organization will be important enough that it should exist over generations.)
- **Decentralized, Federal Organization with Direct Decision-Making and Respect for Minorities** (When they are necessary larger, more complex and formal organizations can only remain self-manageable by their participants if they are decentralized and federal. When face-to-face groups — with the possibility for full participation and convivial discussion and decision-making — become impossible due to size, the best course is to decentralize the organization with many smaller groups in a federal structure. Or when smaller

groups need to organize with peer groups to better address larger-scale problems, free federation is preferred — with absolute self-determination at every level beginning with the base. As long as groups remain of manageable size, assemblies of all concerned must be able to directly make decisions according to whatever methods they find agreeable. However, minorities can never be forced into agreement with majorities on the basis of any fictitious conception of group sovereignty. Anarchy is not direct democracy, though anarchists may certainly choose to use democratic methods of decision-making when and where they wish. The only real respect for minority opinions involves accepting that minorities have the same powers as majorities, requiring negotiation and the greatest level of mutual agreement for stable, effective group decision-making)

In the end, the biggest difference is that anarchists advocate self-organization while leftists want to organize you. For leftists, the emphasis is always on recruiting to their organizations, so that you can adopt the role of a cadre serving their goals. They don't want to see you adopt your own self-determined theory and activities because then you wouldn't be allowing them to manipulate you. Anarchists want you to determine your own theory and activity and self-organize your activity with like-minded others. Leftists want to create ideological, strategic and tactical unity through "self-discipline" (your self-repression) when possible, or organizational discipline (threat of sanctions) when necessary. Either way, you are expected to give up your autonomy to follow their heteronomous path that has already been marked out for you.

Anarchy as a Theory & Critique of Ideology

The anarchist critique of ideology dates from the work of Max Stirner, though he did not use the term himself to describe his critique. Ideology is the means by which alienation, domination and exploitation are all rationalized and justified through the deformation of human thought and communication. All ideology in essence involves the substitution of alien (or incomplete) concepts or images for human subjectivity. Ideologies are systems of false consciousness in which people no longer see themselves directly as subjects in their relation to their world. Instead they conceive of themselves in some manner as subordinate to one type or another of abstract entity or entities which are mistaken as the real subjects or actors in their world.

Whenever any system of ideas and duties is structured with an abstraction at its center — assigning people roles or duties for its own sake — such a system is always an ideology. All the various forms of ideology are structured around different abstractions, yet they all always serve the interests of hierarchical and alienating social structures, since they are hierarchy and alienation in the realm of thought and communication. Even if an ideology rhetorically opposes hierarchy or alienation in its content, its form still remains consistent with what is ostensibly being opposed, and this form will always tend to undermine the apparent content of the ideology. Whether the abstraction is God, the State, the Party, the Organization, Technology, the Family, Humanity, Peace, Ecology, Nature, Work, Love, or even Freedom; if it is conceived and presented as if it is an active subject with a being of its own which makes demands of us, then it is the center of an ideology. Capitalism, Individualism, Communism, Socialism, and Pacifism are each ideological in important respects as they are usually conceived. Religion and Morality are always ideological by their very definitions. Even resistance, revolution and anarchy often take on ideological dimensions when we are not careful to maintain a critical awareness of how

we are thinking and what the actual purposes of our thoughts are. Ideology is nearly ubiquitous. From advertisements and commercials, to academic treatises and scientific studies, almost every aspect of contemporary thinking and communication is ideological, and its real meaning for human subjects is lost under layers of mystification and confusion.

Leftism, as the reification and mediation of social rebellion, is always ideological because it always demands that people conceive of themselves first of all in terms of their roles within and relationships to leftist organizations and oppressed groups, which are in turn considered more real than the individuals who combine to create them. For leftists history is never made by individuals, but rather by organizations, social groups, and — above all, for Marxists — social classes. Each major leftist organization usually molds its own ideological legitimation whose major points all members are expected to learn and defend, if not proselytize. To seriously criticize or question this ideology is always to risk expulsion from the organization.

Post-left anarchists reject all ideologies in favor of the individual and communal construction of self-theory. Individual self-theory is theory in which the integral individual-in-context (in all her or his relationships, with all her or his history, desires, and projects, etc.) is always the subjective center of perception, understanding and action. Communal self-theory is similarly based on the group as subject, but always with an underlying awareness of the individuals (and their own self-theories) which make up the group or organization. Non-ideological, anarchist organizations (or informal groups) are always explicitly based upon the autonomy of the individuals who construct them, quite unlike leftist organizations which require the surrender of personal autonomy as a prerequisite for membership.

Neither God, nor Master, nor Moral Order: Anarchy as Critique of Morality and Moralism

The anarchist critique of morality also dates from Stirner's master work, *The Ego and Its Own* (1844). Morality is a system of reified values — abstract values which are taken out of any context, set in stone, and converted into unquestionable beliefs to be applied regardless of a person's actual desires, thoughts or goals, and regardless of the situation in which a person finds him- or herself. Moralism is the practice of not only reducing living values to reified morals, but of considering oneself better than others because one has subjected oneself to morality (self-righteousness), and of proselytizing for the adoption of morality as a tool of social change.

Often, when people's eyes are opened by scandals or disillusionment and they start to dig down under the surface of the ideologies and received ideas they have taken for granted all their lives, the apparent coherence and power of the new answer they find (whether in religion, leftism or even anarchism) can lead them to believe that they have now found the Truth (with a capital 'T'). Once this begins to happen people too often turn onto the road of moralism, with its attendant problems of elitism and ideology. Once people succumb to the illusion that they have found the one Truth that would fix everything — if only enough other people also understood, the temptation is then to view this one Truth as the solution to the implied Problem around which everything must be theorized, which leads them to build an absolute value system in defense of their magic Solution to the Problem this Truth points them to. At this point moralism takes over the place of critical thinking.

The various forms of leftism encourage different types of morality and moralism, but most generally within leftism the Problem is that people are exploited by capitalists (or dominated by them, or alienated from society or from the productive process. etc.). The Truth is that the People need to take control of the Economy (and/or Society) into their own hands. The biggest Obstacle to this is the Ownership and Control of the Means of Production by the Capitalist Class backed up by its monopoly over the use of legalized violence through its control of the political State. To overcome this people must be approached with evangelical fervor to convince them to reject all aspects, ideas and values of Capitalism and adopt the culture, ideas and values of an idealized notion of the Working Class in order to take over the Means of Production by breaking the power of the Capitalist Class and constituting the power of the Working Class (or its representative institutions, if not their Central Committees or its Supreme Leader) over all of Society... This often leads to some form of Workerism (usually including the adoption of the dominant image of the culture of the working class, in other words, working-class lifestyles), a belief in (usually Scientific) Organizational Salvation, belief in the Science of (the inevitable victory of the Proletariat in) Class Struggle, etc. And therefore tactics consistent with building the fetishized One True Organization of the Working Class to contest for Economic and Political Power. An entire value system is built around a particular, highly oversimplified conception of the world, and moral categories of good and evil are substituted for critical evaluation in terms of individual and communal subjectivity.

The descent into moralism is never an automatic process. It is a tendency which naturally manifests itself whenever people start down the path of reified social critique. Morality always involves derailing the development of a consistent critical theory of self and society. It short-circuits the development of strategy and tactics appropriate for this critical theory, and encourages an emphasis on personal and collective salvation through living up to the ideals of this morality, by idealizing a culture or lifestyle as virtuous and sublime, while demonizing everything else as being either the temptations or perversions of evil. One inevitable emphasis then becomes the petty, continuous attempt to enforce the boundaries of virtue and evil by policing the lives of anyone who claims to be a member of the in-group sect, while self-righteously denouncing out-groups. In the workerist milieu, for example, this means attacking anyone who doesn't sing paeans to the virtues of working class organization (and especially to the virtues of the One True form of Organization), or to the virtues of the dominant image of Working Class culture or lifestyles (whether it be beer drinking instead of drinking wine, rejecting hip subcultures, or driving a Ford or Chevy instead of BMWs or Volvos). The goal, of course, is to maintain the lines of inclusion and exclusion between the in-group and the out-group (the out-group being variously portrayed in highly industrialized countries as the Middle and Upper Classes, or the Petty Bourgeois and Bourgeois, or the Managers and Capitalists big and small).

Living up to morality means sacrificing certain desires and temptations (regardless of the actual situation you might find yourself in) in favor of the rewards of virtue. Don't ever eat meat. Don't ever drive SUVs. Don't ever work 9-5. Don't ever scab. Don't ever vote. Don't ever talk to a cop. Don't ever take money from the government. Don't ever pay taxes. Don't ever etc., etc. Not a very attractive way to go about living your life for anyone interested in critically thinking about the world and evaluating what to do for oneself.

Rejecting Morality involves constructing a critical theory of one's self and society (always self-critical, provisional and never totalistic) in which a clear goal of ending one's social alienation is never confused with reified partial goals. It involves emphasizing what people have to gain from

radical critique and solidarity rather than what people must sacrifice or give up in order to live virtuous lives of politically correct morality.

Post-Left Anarchy: Neither Left, nor Right, but Autonomous

Post-left anarchy is not something new and different. It's neither a political program nor an ideology. It's not meant in any way to constitute some sort of faction or sect within the more general anarchist milieu. It's in no way an opening to the political right; the right and left have always had much more in common with each other than either has in common with anarchism. And it's certainly not intended as a new commodity in the already crowded marketplace of pseudo-radical ideas. It is simply intended as a restatement of the most fundamental and important anarchist positions within the context of a disintegrating international political left.

If we want to avoid being taken down with the wreckage of leftism as it crumbles, we need to fully, consciously and explicitly dissociate ourselves from its manifold failures — and especially from the invalid presuppositions of leftism which led to these failures. This doesn't mean that it's impossible for anarchists to also consider themselves leftists — there has been a long, most often honorable, history of anarchist and left syntheses. But it does mean that in our contemporary situation it is not possible for anyone — even left-anarchists — to avoid confronting the fact that the failures of leftism in practice require a complete critique of leftism and an explicit break with every aspect of leftism implicated in its failures.

Left anarchists can no longer avoid subjecting their own leftism to intensive critique. From this point on it is simply not sufficient (not that it really ever has been) to project all the failures of leftism onto the most explicitly obnoxious varieties and episodes of leftist practice, like Leninism, Trotskyism and Stalinism. The critiques of leftist statism and leftist party organization have always been only the tip of a critique that must now explicitly encompass the entire iceberg of leftism, including those aspects often long incorporated into the traditions of anarchist practice. Any refusal to broaden and deepen the criticism of leftism constitutes a refusal to engage in the self-examination necessary for genuine self-understanding. And stubborn avoidance of self-understanding can never be justified for anyone seeking radical social change.

We now have the unprecedented historical opportunity, along with a plenitude of critical means, to recreate an international anarchist movement that can stand on its own and bow to no other movements. All that remains is for all of us to take this opportunity to critically reformulate our anarchist theories and reinvent our anarchist practices in light of our most fundamental desires and goals.

Reject the reification of revolt. Leftism is dead! Long live anarchy!

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Jason McQuinn
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