

Anarchism In Four Parts

(Video Series Transcript)

Libertarian Socialist Rants

2013

Contents

The Case Against Hierarchy	3
Capitalism	3
The State	4
White Supremacy, Cisheteropatriarchy, and Ableism	5
Concluding Thoughts	7
The Case For Liberty	7
Socialism	8
Statelessness	9
Intersectional feminism, disability accommodation, liberation of oppressed racial groups	10
Concluding Thoughts	11
The Case for Revolution	11
Prefiguration and Anarchist Organisations	12
Direct Action and the Culture of Resistance	13
Social Revolution	14
Internationalism	15
Concluding Thoughts	16
Arguments Against Anarchism	16

This is the transcript of a four-part video series by the YouTube user Libertarian Socialist Rants, which gives an introduction to the basic tenets of anarchism. These videos are updated versions of an old series which he did in 2013.

The Case Against Hierarchy: www.youtube.com

The Case For Liberty: www.youtube.com

The Case For Revolution: www.youtube.com

Arguments Against Anarchism: www.youtube.com

The Case Against Hierarchy

The human race is now in a position in which we are going to have to ask ourselves a very serious question – are we going to continue existing as a civilisation? Human and non-human life is under threat from ecological catastrophe as we sail past the tipping points of anthropogenic global warming. The threat of nuclear warfare is an equally grim prospect brought on by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. These imminent threats are not due to forces beyond our control, but are a direct consequence of how our human activities are currently organised.

We are standing on a cliff edge, and not because the population of the world somehow wills its own destruction, but because we live in a society of highly concentrated wealth and power, in which elite interests exercise dominion over others. In many areas of life, there exist social hierarchies in which people are ranked one above another in terms of status and authority. Because these hierarchies limit the scope of human freedom, they should be challenged to prove that they are legitimate, and if they fail to prove their legitimacy, they should be dismantled from below and replaced with horizontal organisation. This video is a critique of these hierarchical systems.

Capitalism

What are the defining characteristics of capitalism? The means of production – factories, farms, offices etc – are owned privately by individuals. Goods and services are exchanged for profit in a market economy. Another defining feature is wage labour. A capitalist society, by its very nature, is divided into those who own the means of production – the capitalist class – and those who don't – the working class. If you're working class, you have to sell your ability to work to a capitalist in exchange for a wage, which you use to buy the stuff you need to live – that's what wage labour is.

Capitalists need to stay afloat in the marketplace and compete with other capitalists, so they need to keep their prices low – they can't just arbitrarily raise the prices of their products above production costs. How, then, does the capitalist make profit and end up with more value than they started with? Well, the way they do that is by paying workers just enough so that they are able to buy the things they need to survive and go to work each day, but by getting them to produce more value than what they are being paid for. The extra value that workers produce is called surplus value, and capitalists make profit by taking that surplus value for themselves.

To protect this system of private ownership, the power to make decisions about the productive process – what to produce, how to produce it, and what to do with the products – must remain in the hands of private owners. Rather than having control over these decisions, working class

people are made to submit to the authority of bosses. At its core, capitalism is a system in which those who own the means of production exploit and exercise authority over those who don't.

The consequences of this system are as follows. For the vast majority of the population, the working class, we don't have control over our work, but instead have to spend our time – indeed, the bulk of our waking lives – obeying the orders of those above us. And the alternative to wage labour, for the worker, is to scrape by on benefits or starve. We are left without a meaningful choice. We *have* to sell our labour-power *to the capitalists* if we want to live, and because the labour process uses up the physical and mental energies needed to engage in self-directed activity, we cannot then use these capacities in our own time. The 'free time' that we have outside of work isn't really free.

Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's propaganda model, outlined in *Manufacturing Consent*, illustrates how a corporate controlled media disseminates information to reflect the interests of corporations, making it more difficult for anti-capitalist voices to be heard as the system filters them out through self-censorship on the part of individuals. The press represent the interests of the capitalist elite. The 'free press' that we have is actually monopolised by the powerful.

It's no secret that the basic mechanics of the capitalist system concentrate wealth in the hands of a few. Research by Oxfam in 2017 found that just 8 men own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world's population – this exemplifies what Adam Smith called 'the vile maxim of the masters of mankind' – all for ourselves and nothing for other people.

Private profit comes before social need in a capitalist system, and an economy governed by that principle has little care for the environment. It is more profitable for capitalists to sell 10 lawnmowers to 10 people, than it is to sell 1 lawnmower shared by the 10, even if the latter still meets everyone's needs and is less wasteful of resources. Capitalists aren't really interested in the utility of what they produce – for them what matters is production for the sake of making money, and the ecological costs of that are significant.

From a capitalist perspective, democracy is a threat to be contained. Democracy is the idea that the public should run their own affairs. The bottom line is, if you have a system in which a minority of people own the means of production, and they dominate and exploit the majority who don't, the dispossessed majority may well see this system as unjust and demand democratic control and ownership of the means of production. This is the sense in which democracy poses a threat to the capitalist system. Exactly how do capitalists contain the threat of democracy? That question brings us to another hierarchical system.

The State

The state apparatus can be understood in terms of its structure and its function. The modern state is a centralised, hierarchical institution with a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence over a geographical area, governed by a class of professional rulers. Its function includes sustaining the rule of this political class, and also protecting the capitalist system with violence. James Madison, one of the founding fathers of the United States, observed in 1787 that, "In England, at this day, if elections were open to all classes of people, the property of landed proprietors would be insecure." He went on to say that government "ought to be so constituted as to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority."

This function is undertaken by institutions such as the police and the military. It's about class control. If we take militant action as workers, such as striking or occupying to try to improve

our lot in the society, and more significantly if we attempt to bring the workplace under our own control, we will be met with the violence of the police. And across the globe, when popular movements arise to try to advance the interests of the workers, historically the American military has been there, often supporting brutal regimes to repress the people.

'Representative democracies' in which the political leaders are selected by means of public election are preferable to dictatorships, but they rest on the implicit assumption that the public cannot be trusted to represent themselves. Thomas Ferguson's Investment Theory of Party Competition describes how in capitalist societies such as the United States, wealthy business interests control who really gets elected through their financing of political campaigns. Also, remember the propaganda model discussed earlier – the 'free press' that represents capitalist interests is the same 'free press' that covers elections, and which voters get their information from.

Given these vested interests, working within the system it is very difficult to implement policies that further the interests of the population. Social democratic reforms, such as minimum wage laws, health and safety regulations, and the welfare state, have historically come about because the organised working class has exerted enough pressure on the state to force these reforms through as concessions. They are not benevolent gifts from above.

The political class which governs the state subordinates the society to its own interests. This is antithetical to democracy, and it has important implications for the organisation of the economy. For example, in societies such as the USSR, the political class organised the economy in its own interests, and the workers' councils were directly suppressed and undermined by the state machinery and the bureaucracy of the Bolshevik party. Many critics have referred to this as state capitalism, in which the state undertakes the functions of the capitalist class. State capitalism illustrates how the authoritarian left's project of taking state power ultimately failed the working class in the 20th century.

Ultimately, the state's primary enemy is its own population. Its function is to perpetuate its own power and maintain the dominance of a political and economic elite. The chances of such an institution working to serve social goods rather than its own ends are slim. In a system designed for the exercise of power, even individuals with the best of intentions, who want to change the system from within, inevitably become corrupt.

White Supremacy, Cisheteropatriarchy, and Ableism

In addition to capitalism and the state, there are also hierarchies in which people are oppressed along the lines of race, gender identity, sexuality and ability. When talking about white supremacy, often people think that this only refers to fascists and Nazis. While they are white supremacists, white supremacy as a whole is broader, and includes far reaching systems which enforce the political, social and economic dominance of white people over people of colour. It has its roots in slavery, and the pseudo-scientific racism used to justify imperialism.

Slavery may well have been formally abolished, but Jim Crow laws and racial segregation continued up until the 1960s – these systems were not dismantled out of the kindness of the hearts of white people, but as a result of black activism and the civil rights movement. Today, African Americans are frequently abused and shot by police, and the drug war is used as a means of criminalising black life. Michelle Alexander, in 'The New Jim Crow', wrote that, "Nothing has contributed more to the systematic mass incarceration of people of colour than the war on drugs." Drug laws are enforced in such a way as to disproportionately target people of colour, even

though black people are not more likely to use or sell drugs. Not only that but unpaid labour as punishment is allowed in American prisons, and corporations profit from this hyper-exploitation. This is modern day slavery.

Cisheteropatriarchy describes the supremacy and dominance of cisgender, heterosexual men over women and LGBTQ+ people. Society assigns people with a gender at birth – male or female – based on one’s reproductive anatomy, or if you happen to be intersex your reproductive anatomy will likely be changed with coercive surgeries to meet the standards of what society considers acceptable: penis or vulva, such that they can then be placed into the binary categories of gender that society has constructed. Society also assumes that heterosexuality is the normal or default sexual orientation. The social norms which are attached to these categories of gender and sexuality are designed to put cisgender, heterosexual men in a position of authority over everybody else.

Women have to deal with domestic and sexual violence, beauty standards, body shaming, and workplace discrimination such as gendered pay and harassment from bosses. Trans people, who don’t identify with the gender they were assigned at birth have to struggle to access the hormone therapies they need because of gatekeeping, the idea that in order to medically transition they must ‘prove’ their gender identity, and rigid adherence to the notion that individuals must conform to the gender they were assigned.

“Going through my legal name and gender change, and getting approved for surgery. It’s a long, arduous process. It’s not accessible for everybody and it’s kind of a painful, drawn out rigmarole.”

LGBT people are routinely bullied and physically attacked, and two-thirds of LGBT people in the UK feel afraid to hold hands in public. Because of stigma and discrimination, rates of mental illness are higher in the LGBT community. Homosexuality is actively criminalised in many countries. Patriarchal religion has also historically played a significant role in the dissemination of values promoting the subjugation of women and LGBT people.

Ableism is the oppression of disabled people by a society which is organised for the able-bodied and able-minded. The medical model of disability posits that it is purely a biological phenomenon that lives in the mind or body of the individual – however, the social model holds that disability is socially produced by society when it fails to accommodate for the needs of the impaired and doesn’t make adjustments to its institutions. One example of an ableist organisation is Autism Speaks, which views autistic people as a burden who have to be fixed in order to adjust to neurotypical society, rather than accepting autistic people and seeking to change society to be more accommodating. The capitalist system views human beings as instruments of profit – if you are unable to produce surpluses for capitalists, you are seen as unworthy of having your needs met. Capitalists also disregard the additional support needs that disabled workers have in the name of profit. These are just some of the ways in which ableism manifests itself in our society.

What I’ve covered here about identity-based oppression is not nearly as thorough as the analyses of capitalism and the state. This is not because I view these systems of oppression as being of lesser significance, and for more detailed discussion around identity politics I recommend checking out the YouTubers anarchopac, Riley J Dennis, and ContraPoints. However, I hope that despite the comparative brevity, you understand that the underlying principle of scepticism towards social hierarchy applies just as much to these systems in which people are oppressed according to their race, gender identity, sexuality and ability as it does to capitalism and the state.

Concluding Thoughts

Consider the position outlined at the beginning of this video – because they limit the scope of human freedom, hierarchies should be challenged to prove their legitimacy, and if they fail to meet this challenge, they should be dismantled from below and replaced with horizontal organisation. The hierarchical systems considered here – capitalism, the state, white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy and ableism – are interlinked. These interlocking systems come together to form a totality – the society in which we live.

What justification is there for the dominance of white people over people of colour? What justification is there for queerphobia? What justification is there for men to wield authority over others? What justification is there for there to be arbitrary barriers preventing impaired people from participating fully in society? What justification is there for the masses to not have control over our own work? What justification is there for autocratic control of economic, political and social life? What justification is there for the widespread apathy, disempowerment, and rampant alienation that all of these systems cause? When our technology has advanced to a stage where we can be emancipated from toil and the tyranny of want, what justification is there to condemn people to drudgery, to deprive people of healthcare, food, and education, and to allow millions to die of hunger and preventable disease each year because the world's productive forces have been ring-fenced by the few? I invite you, dear viewer, to try to imagine the scale of the squandering of human potential that occurs every day because individuals with amazing ingenuity, creativity and powers of reasoning have to live under the boots of authority. What conceivable justification is there for that?

Underneath this mountain of oppressive systems lies the great majority of humanity. In my opinion, all of us who neither own the means of production nor occupy positions of political power, and are there a part of the working class, have a common interest in organising to overthrow capitalism and the state. All oppressions along the lines of race, gender identity, sexuality and ability have to be dismantled. Ultimately, all of these hierarchies are a threat to human liberty, equality, and solidarity. In the name of these principles, we must carry out a great project of human emancipation, dismantling all of these arbitrary hierarchical systems from below and replacing them with horizontality. This is anarchism. In my next video, I want to discuss what an anarchist society might look like and paint a picture of a world worth fighting for.

The Case For Liberty

In part one, I argued that capitalism, statism, white supremacy, ableism and cisheteropatriarchy are all manifestations of hierarchy that should be dismantled because they fail to prove their legitimacy. I argued that the reason hierarchies have to prove their legitimacy is that they limit the scope of human liberty. Liberty is the possibility of engaging in self-directed activity through which one can develop human capacities to the fullest extent. Anarchists seek to achieve equality of liberty – meaning we want the possibility of self-improving, self-directed activity to be equally available to everyone. Solidarity is when people co-operate to achieve common goals and form altruistic relations of mutual support. In other words, we oppose hierarchy, and we advocate liberty, equality and solidarity as a package. We think that the organisation of society should reflect these principles. In this video, I want to outline how this is possible, and share a vision of full human emancipation in all aspects of life.

Socialism

Because we advocate for the possibility of self-improving, self-directed activity to be available to everyone, we think that economic institutions should reflect this. Capitalism should be replaced with socialism. This means that the workers should collectively own and democratically control the means of production. So, in the factories, farms, offices and so on, we would have control over our own labour, and we would decide together what to produce, how to produce it, and what to do with the products. We could organise ourselves in our workplaces by means of horizontal workers' councils that would link up together in various industries to form directly democratic economic federations. These federations would carry out decentralised economic planning. A libertarian socialist economy would therefore not be centrally planned like WalMart, Amazon, Starbucks, or the Leninist state owned systems, but instead would involve the direct participation of the workers in the management of industry.

In 'Ours to Master and to Own', compiled by Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini, there are many examples given of workers' control in practice. The largest experiment in workers' control of industry happened during the Spanish revolution, from 1936–1939. According to Frank Mintz in 'Anarchism and Workers' Self-management in Revolutionary Spain', around 1,838,000 people were involved in the creation of industrial and agricultural collectives. Industrial democracy was implemented across various areas of the economy, such as water, gas, electricity, transportation, medicine, agriculture, textiles and engineering. The Spanish revolution showed how libertarian socialism could be implemented on a large scale.

In Homage to Catalonia, George Orwell wrote of his experiences of the revolution.

“There was no unemployment, and the price of living was still extremely low; you saw very few conspicuously destitute people, and no beggars except the gypsies. Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine. In the barbers shops there were anarchist notices solemnly explaining that the barbers were no longer slaves.” Later, he says, “Many of the normal motives of civilized life – snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc – had simply ceased to exist. The ordinary class-division of society had disappeared to an extent that is almost unthinkable in the money-tainted air of England; there was no one there except the peasants and ourselves, and no one owned anyone else as his master.”

That is the world we want.

If the productive forces were in our hands as workers, much of the labour that people find boring could be automated with technology, or shared amongst the community by means of rotation, and labour that serves no purpose, such as public relations, bureaucracy, and other bullshit jobs, could be abolished. This would open up avenues for the pursuit of leisure, art, philosophy and many other human activities that aren't valued by the market system. Work could be transformed from something people have to be driven to do under authority, into free, self-managed, self-improving activity. This is the abolition of capitalist labour.

We could make the transfer to relying on eco-friendly sources of energy, such as solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal energy, allowing us to shut down the fossil fuel industries which destroy the environment. With production no longer being driven by profit, we could build socially useful

products which last, rather than building them to break as is currently done under capitalism. The introduction of socialism would be an appropriate adaptation to the current ecological crisis.

Once we have a socialist system, we will be able to decide how we want to distribute goods and services. Personally, I advocate the principle of communism, which is 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need'. Other socialists advocate for worker-owned co-operatives to operate within a market system, and others advocate for labour voucher systems, which are slightly different to money in the sense that it is still remuneration for work, however labour vouchers can't be accumulated in the way that money can be. While I favour the communist principle, I do think that ultimately we will need to experiment and see what works.

Statelessness

Anarchists define the state as a hierarchically organised institution which has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence over a geographical area, and is governed by a class of professional rulers. The primary functions of the state are to perpetuate the rule of both the political ruling class which controls the state and the economic ruling class that controls the economy. Abolishing the state means overthrowing the political class and creating institutions that defend our system – socialism – against theirs. During the revolutionary period bringing about the transition from capitalism to socialism, the working class will exercise its will over the capitalist class through organised violence.

This transitional period is also advocated by Marxists. So at this point, it's important to distinguish between Marxist and anarchist views on the state. Marxists generally define the state as any organisation used to enforce the will of one class over another – that would include institutions in which the working class exercises its will over the capitalist class through organised violence. The disagreement between anarchists and Marxists concerns how such institutions should be organised. Within Marxist thought there is a spectrum of views as to how the institutions of working class rule over the capitalist class should be organised, some of which overlaps with anarchism. The trouble with the Marxist view of the state is that it ignores the existence of the political ruling class, and in practice this results in the political class exercising power over the working class, under the guise of the working class being emancipated from the capitalist class.

Anarchists oppose this, and argue that we shouldn't have a political class asserting its will over and above the working class. We don't believe in creating elite groups which claim to act on behalf of the working class, because these elites would ultimately develop interests of their own due to the corrupting influence of power. We believe that the institutions enforcing the will of the working class over the capitalist class ought to be non-hierarchically organised. We want to have federations of workers' militias and workers' councils, so that the working class as a whole is self-ruling. Being organisations of class rule, such institutions would meet the Marxist criteria for a state, but they would not meet the anarchist criteria, because they would be non-hierarchical.

For Marxists, a stateless society arises once all class distinctions have been eradicated, and so it becomes no longer necessary to have institutions enforcing the will of one class over another. Marxists call this the withering away of the state. From an anarchist perspective, this advanced stage of statelessness is only possible if the organisations of working class rule are in themselves non-hierarchical. This is because a hierarchical and centralised state governed by a class of pro-

fessional rulers would not wither away but instead represent the distinct interests and power of the political class that governs it, which would ultimately undermine socialism.

The statelessness which can be achieved immediately upon the abolition of capitalism is the non-hierarchical organisation of the institutions of working class rule over the capitalist class. Advanced statelessness can be achieved once the capitalist class has been repressed by these institutions, and is no longer a threat, at which point the workers' militias could then be disbanded. It's my view that the immediately achievable statelessness is both the most appropriate means to defend socialism, and also a necessary precondition to achieving the advanced statelessness of the future.

Intersectional feminism, disability accommodation, liberation of oppressed racial groups

The human principles of liberty, equality and solidarity underlie the abolition of capitalism and the state. They also underlie the abolition of cisheteropatriarchy, ableism, and white supremacy. Dismantling cisheteropatriarchy means a number of things. Gender, under cisheteropatriarchy, is something that is assigned to people at birth. It also consists in the sexist and cissexist assumptions about what traits belong together, such as physical traits, modes of dress, mannerisms and interests, and the social categories (in our society, male and female) that are formed from the assignment and the assumptions. Women are expected to be subordinate to men, and men are expected to hide or repress normal human emotions such as fear and sadness – these are examples of how gender operates in our society.

When anarchists talk about the abolition of capitalist labour, we mean the transformation of work from something that people are driven to do under authority, into free, self-managed, self-improving activity. We can think a similar way about the abolition of gender. We seek to transform gender from how it exists under cisheteropatriarchy – as a hierarchical, imposed, binary classification system – into how it will exist in a free society without cisheteropatriarchy – as a mode of individual self-expression, such that society is a diverse plurality of genders that emerges when individuals are allowed to be themselves. To that end, we should provide people with the means to live out their gender and express themselves as they see fit. Transgender healthcare should be provided according to need. This means therapy such as counselling, puberty blockers for trans kids, safe hormones, and a wide range of highly customisable surgeries should be available to informed, consenting adults. People should not have to justify or give reasons why they are seeking any of these treatments in order to receive them. Anyone with any body can be any gender.

The abolition of ableism consists in changing the organisation of society such that the needs of the impaired are accounted for. Many disabled people are excluded from the workforce under capitalism because it would eat into the boss' profits to make adjustments, or because we cannot work fast enough to make profit. If we applied the principle, "from each according to their ability," we could remove these arbitrary barriers, and disabled workers could work at our own pace. Applied properly, "To each according to their need" means that in our production of buildings, equipment, technologies, and so on, we ought to fully account for the physical and psychological variations, and therefore the differences in needs, that exist across the human population.

We ought to eschew the medical hierarchy and promote horizontal relationships between patients and health workers, such that the satisfaction of the patient's needs is what matters rather

than simply reproducing the behavioural norms of compliance to authority that are required to function in a hierarchical society. Hogeweyk in the Netherlands is a village and care facility for people with dementia that seeks to emphasise their autonomy in their final years of life. We should create self-managed therapeutic communities similar to this, where individuals with similar conditions support each other. We should see an end to coercive, dehumanising psychiatric hospitals, and create beautiful, peaceful retreats where those suffering from mental illness and psychological trauma are given the space and time to heal, free of judgement. Instead of patriarchal, capitalist medicalisation of normal parts of the human experience, we could live with dignity.

To liberate oppressed racial groups, the institutions of xenophobia and white supremacy must be abolished. All borders, police forces, prisons and detention centres need to be shut down. In *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin argues for the transformation of justice. He says, "Instead of eye-for eye punishment, there should be restitution to the victims, their families or society," and goes on to say that in place of the racist police and prison system, there should be "community-run programs and centres interested solely with human regeneration and social training, rather than custodial supervision in an inhuman lockup." In working class communities we ought to create self-managed institutions of restorative justice that provide an alternative to policing. Ervin also argues that an international black labour organisation ought to be created, as part of a global black revolutionary movement against capitalism, racism, imperialism, and military dictatorship. One could argue that the institutions created by black people to dismantle these systems of oppression, in a future society, might also be a means of promoting positive conceptions of black identity and undoing the stereotyping that results from centuries of racism.

Concluding Thoughts

The anarchist vision of society is one of full human emancipation: stateless socialism, communism, and the dismantling of all hierarchies that oppress people on the grounds of gender, sexuality, ability, and race. These far reaching changes would promote the human values of liberty, equality and solidarity. They are the forms of organisation through which the possibility of self-directed, self-improving activity could be made available to everyone. If we want to get the best out of human nature, we ought to create an environment in which our valuable capacities can be allowed to flourish and develop. Organising the economy and the society as a network of self-managed, free associations is how we can fulfil this objective. We have every reason to believe that human beings would thrive under these conditions. This is the world that we need and deserve. This is the world that is possible.

So how do we get there? In my next video, I want to address the question of how we move from an authoritarian society to an anarchist one, so stay tuned.

The Case for Revolution

Anarchists argue that illegitimate authority should be dismantled from below. As human beings, we are innately curious about our possibilities for self-improving, self-directed activity, and we become justifiably angry when those possibilities are limited by the exercise of power. Our curiosity towards freedom and our anger towards injustice can be channelled into anarchist practice.

Anarchist practice is about taking actions to destroy hierarchy and to create horizontality in its place, evaluating the effectiveness of these actions, and using that evaluation to guide further actions. In this video, I want to talk about some of these actions of destruction and creation that I think are effective.

Prefiguration and Anarchist Organisations

Prefiguration can be summed up in the slogan 'building the new society in the shell of the old'. Anarchism cannot exist if we do not organise ourselves in an anarchist manner, and so we must create the social relations of liberty, equality and solidarity (free co-operation between equals) that will characterise an anarchist society, in the present world as it is. That is prefiguration. Anarchists want to build a socialist society based on common ownership of the means of production, workers' self-management and direct democracy. That means that we need to create working class organisations that are self-managed and directly democratic, and these organisations need to struggle against capitalism and the state.

An example of such working class self-organisation is anarcho-syndicalist unions. Anarcho-syndicalist unions are labour unions organised in an anarchist manner. They have two major functions, which are in the short term to struggle for better pay, shorter hours and other benefits while capitalism still exists, and in the long term, to seize the means of production with a general strike, and form the democratic organs of a libertarian socialist economy. Examples of syndicalist unions include the Industrial Workers of the World, which is somewhat anarchist in its character, and the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo or CNT, which played a significant role in the Spanish revolution.

As well as syndicalist unions, many anarchists also advocate for the creation of specific anarchist federations, which also have a direct-democratic structure. Two kinds of anarchist federations are synthesis federations and platformist federations. Synthesis federations are organisations which attempt to bring together anarchists of different stripes – mutualists, collectivists, communists, syndicalists and individualists (not anarcho-capitalists), all under a big tent approach. Platformist federations are more tightly organised, based on ideological and tactical unity, collective responsibility and federalism. Ideological and tactical unity means the members all have a shared, common set of ideas and goals, as well as common methods, such that we don't contradict ourselves in our thought and action. Collective responsibility means that individual members are responsible for the political activities of the federation, and the federation as a whole is responsible for the political activities of the individuals. Federalism refers to the organisation of the platform by means of horizontality and free agreement.

Organisational dualism is an anarchist perspective which argues for specific anarchist organisations like platformist federations to work alongside mass organisations like syndicalist unions, to facilitate the conditions for working class self-emancipation. Personally I think that's a strong position. Although I have some caveats about collective responsibility, namely that it can be appropriate for individuals to act in a personal capacity, platformism and syndicalism, roughly speaking, are what I think anarchists should be doing. That's not to say that networks of small, self-managed affinity groups aren't also valuable; these forms of organisation stem from our natural human ways of relating to one another – groups of friends – however, a mass social movement to dismantle capitalism and the state, and take over the running of an advanced industrial society requires mass organisation.

Direct Action and the Culture of Resistance

A key role of anarchist organisations is to take direct action. Direct action is action taken by oppressed people to disrupt or dismantle oppressive systems without the interference of authority figures and bureaucrats. Referring back to the principle of prefiguration, we hold that horizontal structures are the legitimate bases of action, not whatever the authorities will allow. We cannot allow authorities to set parameters around our resistance, because those parameters reflect their interests, and exclude the actions necessary to dismantle them. These are key reasons for taking direct action.

With escalating campaigns of direct action, we can force bosses to meet our material demands. This can include things as small as a demand delivery, where we produce a letter demanding that our grievances be resolved, and hand over the letter to the employer with a visible show of collective support. It can also include a communications blockade, where we hammer the bosses with complaints over the phone, social media, emails and so on, all in the same time period. Further up the scale are strikes and pickets, where we refuse to work and form a line outside of the shop to stop people from entering. We can also occupy the workplace and stop management from entering, which they know is just a step below expropriating them and running things ourselves. Seizing the means of production requires direct action on a mass scale, in particular, a general strike, where all of the workers across all industries refuse to work. Our labour is the source of their profits, so if we stop working, they stop profiting. With our collective strength, we can shut down the basis of the capitalist system.

Although direct action is the reason we won the 8-hour day, minimum wage laws, and health and safety regulations, it isn't just about economic struggle. For example, sit-ins and riots played a significant role in the black civil rights movement in the US, fighting racial segregation. They won. In 1965, 150 gender non-conforming people occupied Dewey's Coffee Shop to fight discriminatory denials of service to LGBT people. They won. In 1977, disabled people took part in the 504 Sit-in, occupying federal buildings, forcing Joseph Califano to sign federal civil rights protections for disabled people. They won. These historic victories are examples of how, when we act for ourselves instead of submitting to the authority of bosses and politicians, we win. Just recently, a Swedish woman stood up on a plane to prevent the deportation of an Afghan refugee to almost certain death – this kind of civil disobedience organised on a large scale would be an excellent way of resisting border controls and the Trump regime.

By participating in direct action and anarchist modes of organisation, people become transformed by revolutionary activity, and learn the skills of self-organisation that are needed for the future society. A culture of resistance is about developing that transformation, and therefore militant anti-authoritarianism, on a mass scale. We want anarchist ideas and practices to proliferate among our class and all oppressed groups.

Anarchist organisations need to produce outreach material, which shows people what we do, what we're for and against, and why. This material needs to present anarchist ideas and methods in a manner which is both informative and highly accessible to the public. Oppression is an urgent matter, and we cannot waste our time with academic masturbation, producing material written for the sake of sounding smart that nobody outside of a small clique is going to understand. Likewise, we should also reject anti-intellectualism, or the notion that working class people are somehow too stupid to take an interest in theory. Both of these tendencies are destructive, and they present a barrier to bringing solid anarchist politics to the masses. In our

outreach material, we also need to record when our actions succeed and fail, and why, so that we can apply what we've learned.

Sometimes, it's necessary to organise independently as people who are oppressed according to gender, sexuality, race, ability and so on, without the interference of groups that are at an advantage. This follows from basic anarchist ideas of autonomy; oppressed people are strengthened when we can share common experiences and use that to guide our actions. In anarchist organisations, there ought to be specific caucuses for these groups.

A culture of resistance is also about building self-organised structures of mutual aid, which subvert systems of oppression. Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin has written about building a black survival programme, which includes things like creating a Black liberation educational system from nursery to college, where black people can increase their self-knowledge and learn their history. The Black Panthers organised free breakfast programmes for school children and educated the youth about black liberation. One of the demands of the local chapter of Action for Trans Health in my city is for trans people to be properly medically trained, so that they can safely meet their own needs and bypass the bureaucracy that's been created against them. These kinds of things are a part of the culture of resistance.

There ought to be anti-fascist organisations, which physically confront white supremacists, stop them from organising, and work in communities to counter the ideologies that are convenient for capital and the state. We need to make the point that immigrants don't drive down wages, bosses do.

Many people already believe that politicians are corrupt liars. A culture of resistance means the ruling class are completely delegitimized in the popular imagination, so that for every sickening royal display, it's matched with widespread calls for the guillotine. In Argentina, around the time of the recovered factory movement, the slogan was 'que se vayan todos' – all of them must go. At one point five presidents were overthrown in ten days due to the upheavals. That's the culture of resistance.

Social Revolution

Anarchists don't want a political revolution. We're not interested in Bolshevik-style coups, a mere change of rulers, or small groups of conspirators claiming to act on the public's behalf, and we don't believe a free society can be constructed by means of a government decree. We want a social revolution – the complete dismantling of hierarchical systems in all aspects of life. Suppose that there exists a large network of affinity groups, syndicalist unions, anarchist organisations, community assemblies, anti-fascist groups and so on. Through the infrastructure of popular organisations of struggle, the masses have developed the skills for self-government, and ultimately desire the abolition of all oppressive hierarchies, and the construction of a state and class free, libertarian socialist society. If our organisations are shutting down industry, using a revolutionary general strike to try to take possession of the means of production – at that point, the ruling class is left with the police and military.

That's the biggest barrier to an anarchist society. The ruling class use brute force through the police and military to exercise authority over the rest of us, and they will not relinquish their power. They use physical aggression against us to maintain their rule. For these reasons, alongside a general strike, an armed insurrection would be necessary to carry out coercive expropriation of capitalists, and to confront the state. Anarchists generally hold that this is justified

on the grounds that we are defending ourselves against a system which is fundamentally violent towards us. As I've said before, we need horizontal federations of workers' militias to defend ourselves against reaction, things like Makhno's Black Army that existed in Ukraine, or the Durruti Column in Spain.

There are a number of things to bear in mind when thinking about the possibility of conflict with the state. The first is that many people join the state military to get access to certain benefits like education. We can circumvent that over time by meeting people's needs through the infrastructure of popular organisations. This infrastructure should also aim to completely delegitimise the propaganda that joining the ruling class' military is fighting for freedom and democracy. These factors would make it more difficult for the state to Hoover people up from the domestic population as resistance to the capitalist system grows. So we can shrink their military. Secondly, the conditions that would be created up to and during a revolutionary situation, would increase the likelihood of mutinies and defection – so for those who do join their military, having been told a story that they are protecting the domestic population from invaders, only to then receive instructions to fire on that population – a proportion of that group may well defect and refuse to fight. So there'd be a fair chance of mutiny on their part. Thirdly and finally, popular militias would massively outnumber the remaining police and military that they'd have, and they could be defeated with a guerrilla campaign. States do whatever they can to keep popular movements broken up, small and divided, because the armed and organised masses are too great a threat for them to contain. Having carried out coercive expropriation and overthrown the state, the infrastructure of popular organisations would become the new means of organising industry and the society, and we would have libertarian socialism.

Internationalism

Our aim should not merely be to create anarchism in some small pocket of the world. In those situations, surrounding powers will do what they can to economically strangle and violently crush it, like they did in Spain and Ukraine. Capitalism is a global system, and it will take a global effort to dismantle it. For these reasons, the libertarian socialist movement needs to be international in its scope. Anarchist organisations need to affiliate into an international confederation, which some have done – the International of Anarchist Federations has member organisations in Europe, Argentina, Mexico and Chile, and it keeps close contact with the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers' Association, which has member organisations in Europe, Australia, the United States and Brazil. These kinds of organisations should be a means of co-ordinating revolutionary activity on an international scale.

Should there be an anarchist social revolution in a given area, I think the international response should be one of providing mutual aid to the revolution, and also using the threat of a good example to catalyse revolutionary activity in other areas across the globe. What we want is a situation where revolutions are snowballing from country to country. The formal abolition of chattel slavery, and the end of feudalism shows how systems that are international in their scope can be overturned. There's no reason to believe that capitalism is somehow an exception or that it's going to last forever.

Concluding Thoughts

To sum up – prefiguration, anarchist organisations, direct action, social revolution and internationalism are an interconnected web of strategies and tactics that we can use to bring anarchism to the world in which we presently live. If we want an anarchist society, these are the practices which, (in my opinion) are the most effective to bring that about. I've not said anything about lifestylism, propaganda of the deed, illegalism or insurrectionary anarchism, which I don't view as effective strategies. Some anarchists will disagree with me on that, or indeed on the other points I've raised. This is just a positive case for the strategies that I think are effective.

The best-case scenario is that enough people participate in these actions and organise together, seeing an end to global capitalism and ushering in the construction of a non-hierarchical society. The worst-case scenario is that not enough people participate in these actions, and global capitalism unfolds into humanitarian catastrophe on a scale that we can't recover from. We're not going to know if that's transpired until it's too late, so we might as well act now to increase the chances of the best-case scenario, and if the worst comes to the worst, we will at least have the consolation of saying that we tried our best.

Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. To quote Buenaventura Durruti – “We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the Earth; there is not the slightest doubt about that. The capitalist class might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world, here in our hearts, and that world is growing in this minute.”

Arguments Against Anarchism

Anarchism is a tendency which holds that hierarchies which fail to prove their legitimacy should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human liberty. Anarchists advocate a stateless society in which the means of production are held in common, and industry and communities are organised democratically by means of decentralised free federation. Modern anarchists (so long as they're consistent in their anarchism) also oppose racism, sexism, queerphobia and ableism. Because we take this unique position on the political compass of rejecting hierarchy altogether, we are reviled by people who advocate all kinds of hierarchical systems – liberals, Leninists, etc. Anarchism is one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented tendencies. In this video I want to respond to common arguments against anarchism.

“An anarchist society would be rife with anti-social behaviour. Individuals could be, for example, physically violent towards others, or they could rob people of their possessions, and there would be no repercussions for these kinds of actions. In an anarchist society, someone who gets a kick out of being horrible to others would be free to terrorise the community as they see fit!”

Importantly, anarchists hold that freedom to limit others' freedom is no freedom at all. We want a society run by means of horizontal, democratically controlled federations. Within that institutional framework, people could collectively determine codes of conduct in an anarchist manner, to address and respond to any anti-social behaviour that might arise. In present organisations such as AFed, there are codes of conduct against oppressive behaviour, abuse, harassment etc. I don't have a blueprint for exactly how those kinds of procedures would work in a large scale society because I think that's for participants in the future society to decide. Nevertheless, the point stands that anarchism does not mean 'everyone does what they want no matter the harm to others'.

Secondly, anarchists generally argue that the majority of anti-social behaviour occurs as a result of hierarchical systems. Under capitalism, the ruling class appropriate the products of the labour of the workers, leaving everyone else fighting for scraps, lashing out in violence, and committing robberies out of necessity. In 'The Spirit Level' by Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, evidence is given to show that economic inequality damages mental and physical health, corrodes trust, and increases violence and anxiety. The introduction of a socialist system, where the means of production are democratically controlled, would eliminate structural poverty and the crime that goes with it. We could also massively reduce sexual violence by abolishing patriarchy, normalising sex positivity, and providing people with a robust and comprehensive understanding of consent and human relationships from an early age. The overarching point here is that the relations of equality and solidarity created by an anarchist social order would eliminate the structural causes of most crimes to the extent that police and prisons would be unnecessary.

Finally, in a hierarchical society, power structures exist where those who get a kick out of being horrible to others can gain tremendous influence and get away with their crimes scot-free. A society structured in an anarchist manner would stop these people from gaining such influence and nip the problem in the bud. Anarchists are not under the illusion that everybody would be perfect in an anarchist society. Rather, we think that an anarchist society would create conditions under which the likelihood of anti-social behaviour would be dramatically reduced, responses to such behaviour could be democratically organised, and there would not be centres of power through which those individuals could do far more damage than they would in a horizontal society.

"Anarchism only works on a small scale. There are billions of people in the world! Horizontalism could not work on that scale."

Horizontalism does not mean that we don't have any kind of delegation when that's necessary to organise in large groups. For example, in a large federation with huge numbers of people and lots of groups in different localities, it's just not practically feasible to have decisions taken in one giant meeting of every single member of the federation. Delegation means that each of the local groups in a federation comes to a decision democratically, and instead of the giant meeting, we have a delegate meeting in which the decisions of the local groups are gathered by delegates from each group, allowing for the local groups to effectively work together and take decisions as a mass body.

Delegates can be selected typically by direct democracy, lottery (picking names out of a hat), or rotation (people taking turns). They are instantly recallable should they fail to do their democratic duties properly. Delegates are not politicians, considering that they're not a ruling class, and they don't control any kind of centralised state apparatus. Crucially, they don't make decisions for other people – the people decide and then they take the message. Delegation presents a non-hierarchical solution to the practical question of large scale organisation.

An example of this kind of delegation in action would be in the organisation of healthcare in Barcelona during the Spanish revolution. Barcelona was divided into nine zones, each with its own syndicate, and delegates from each zone would come together into a committee that would deal with common problems and implement a common plan. The Spanish revolution, from 1936–39, was the largest example of an anarchist society, in which, according to Frank Mintz, 1,838,000 people were involved in collectivisation and self-management. Sam Dolgoff's estimate is much higher at around 8 million. The population of the less well-known Ukrainian Free Territory was

around 7 million. So anarchism in practice is not just a small, hippie commune in the woods – we have the tools to make it work for millions of people.

“Production and consumption guided by the principle, “from each according to their ability, to each according to their need” would never work. Under communism, everybody would just greedily take stuff, and nobody would bother to do the unpleasant work.”

First of all, ‘to each according to their need’ does not necessarily mean everyone would consume to excess in practice. For example, if you go to a library, you don’t just take as many books as possible, you take the books you need. An interesting example is all-you-can-eat buffets. A 2011 study of an all-you-can-eat pizza restaurant found that when the buffet was more expensive, people ate more to try to get their money’s worth. They ate less when they had a discount – even though in both cases they could eat as much as they want (take according to need). If money weren’t involved at all, would people just gorge themselves? No, they’d just eat to satisfy the need for a full stomach.

When it comes to unpleasant work, there are a number of points to make. The first is that, if the means of production were held in common, much of the unpleasant work could be automated. Secondly, we could decide democratically to share the remaining unpleasant work among the community, perhaps by means of rotation. Thirdly, by abolishing unnecessary and bureaucratic jobs, we would have more people to share the work among. Finally, in a communitarian anarchist society, work would be self-managed, which would make it far less unpleasant. More generally, the institutions of such a society would foster a sense of belonging. By doing this work, people would know that they are contributing to the good of society, and the satisfaction of human needs. For those reasons, I think people would choose to do the necessary, unpleasant work under anarchist communism.

“But aren’t hierarchies just natural? Anarchism goes against human nature.”

Human beings do have a nature. We need food, shelter, sleep, we reproduce from sex, and so on. Furthermore, psychologists Ed Deci and Richard Ryan founded self-determination theory, which posits that humans have innate psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy, and that these needs exist across cultures. We need to feel like we’re effective in dealing with the environment around us and that we’re good at what we do. We need to feel connected to other people, and we need control over our lives. To the extent that those needs are met, we thrive, and to the extent that they are thwarted, we become ill and alienated.

Anarchists argue that hierarchical systems produce illness and alienation, whereas systems based on horizontal, free co-operation create the conditions for human flourishing. In my opinion, this is because horizontal systems are more appropriate to satisfy our innate needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy than hierarchical systems – I have a full video on this called ‘Anarchism and Human Nature’ which goes into more detail on these points. I disagree with anarchists who claim that there is no human nature.

Given the findings of self-determination theory, the idea that hierarchies go with the grain of human nature is dubious – it disregards the negative psychological impact that domination has on those who are subjected to it by depriving them of autonomy.

Human nature arguments for hierarchy seem to merely defend power on the grounds of the felt experience of exercising it, which is seriously ethically questionable. The claim that hierarchical systems are built into our nature is an extremely conservative argument masquerading as realism, and the science just doesn’t support it.

“But everyone naturally gravitates towards cultivating different sets of skills and abilities. Doesn’t that mean that people who are particularly good at something will be deferred to, and doesn’t that make hierarchy inevitable?”

Anarchists conceive of liberty as the possibility of engaging in self-directed activity, through which one can develop human capacities to the fullest extent. We advocate equality of liberty, meaning we want the possibility of self-improving, self-directed activity to be equally available to everyone. Anarchists distinguish between competent authority and hierarchical authority. Hierarchical authority is placing limitations on liberty, whereas competent authority is when an individual is deferred to for their skills and knowledge in a given area. An example of competent authority would be deferring to a good doctor for appropriate medical advice.

In this case an individual recognises that they need medical advice, and that their own knowledge is insufficient to satisfy this need, so the constraints of their own reasoning lead them to defer to the good doctor with the relevant knowledge. Deferring to someone for their knowledge does not limit your self-directed activity and human development, and so competent authority does not violate liberty. The fact that humans tend towards diverse interests means that competent authority will inevitably emerge from equality of liberty. Under communism, where all things are for all, and everyone has access to the means of developing whatever skills and abilities they choose, competent authority doesn’t have to be transmuted into hierarchical authority. People can specialise in an egalitarian society, there’s just no monopolisation of resources that means certain professions are the reserve of a few while everyone else is condemned to drudgery.

Now let’s consider some of the criticisms that Marxists, especially Leninists, make about anarchism.

“To achieve a socialist or communist society, you need to coercively expropriate capitalists, and you need to defend the revolution against reactionary forces. How can that be done without a state?”

Anarchists agree on the necessity of coercive expropriation to establish socialism. For anarchists, a state is a hierarchical and centralised institution with a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, governed by a class of professional rulers. However, coercive expropriation of capitalists and revolutionary defence can be organised by federations of horizontal workers’ councils and workers’ militias, and because these institutions are non-hierarchical, they aren’t a state.

They might be a state in the Marxist sense of the term. However, if you’re trying to refute anarchism on this point, you have to prove that the state in the sense that anarchists define it is necessary to carry out coercive expropriation and revolutionary defence. If you just say that federations of horizontal workers’ councils and workers’ militias are a state, and then say ‘see, why would you be an anarchist’, you’re actually just missing the point of why anarchists critique hierarchical organisation and the political class, and you’re failing to justify that particular kind of system.

The seizure of state power is an extremely effective way of crushing a socialist revolution. Historically, the ruling classes that have governed states have always acted to destroy the institutions of workers’ control. So seizing state power isn’t a good means of defending a revolution, but rather crushing it. The Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and the actions of the Communists in Spain, France, and Ukraine, attacking self-management during the Spanish revolution and trying to contain the French wave of wildcat strikes in May 1968, and crushing the Ukrainian Makhnovist movement are all examples of how Leninist methods are profoundly counter-revolutionary in practice.

“Anarchists don’t realise that Marxists and Leninists want to smash the existing state machinery and replace the capitalist state with a workers’ state. They conflate the two because they think all states are bad.”

Anarchists would respond to this by arguing that, if by the state we mean the hierarchical institution as previously defined, then there can be no workers’ state, precisely for the reasons mentioned earlier – that the ruling class governing the state represents its own distinct interests rather than those of the working class. Again, we think that federations of workers’ militias and councils are good, but we don’t define that as a state. In practice Leninists don’t replace the state machinery with these kinds of organisation, but in fact leave the hierarchical system intact, regardless of the libertarian-sounding rhetoric Lenin used in ‘State and Revolution’.

“Anarchism is just bourgeois individualism, because they centre individual freedom rather than collective organisation as the basis of their politics.”

This is probably the weakest critique that Marxists and Leninists make of anarchists, as it just shows a lack of basic understanding of anarchist theory and practice. We have historically understood liberty as an eminently social phenomenon. In ‘Man, Society and Freedom’, Bakunin wrote,

“The materialistic, realistic, and collectivist conception of freedom, as opposed to the idealistic, is this: Man becomes conscious of himself and his humanity only in society and only by the collective action of the whole society. He frees himself from the yoke of external nature only by collective and social labor, which alone can transform the earth into an abode favorable to the development of humanity. Without such material emancipation the intellectual and moral emancipation of the individual is impossible.”

We can of course disregard Bakunin’s typical use of the default man here, but nevertheless the points about freedom stand. The individual is only able to fully develop themselves as part of a community. The Makhnovists in Ukraine and the CNT in Spain illustrated the anarchist values of collective organisation in practice historically. The charge that anarchists don’t centre collective organisation in our politics is false. Also, generally decrying anarchists for caring about individual freedom does a disservice to some of the most positive ideas within Marxism, namely that communism provides the appropriate conditions for the emancipation of the individual.

Those are my responses to some of the major objections to anarchism. I hope that you’ve enjoyed this series, that you found it informative and accessible, and that any misconceptions you might have had about anarchism were put to rest. I also hope that you’re inspired to join anarchist organisations in your area or start one if they don’t exist yet, and take action to change the world. I’m going to upload the transcripts for this series to the anarchist library. I’ve enjoyed putting this together, I think that it’s a big improvement on the old series, I’ve tried to take a lot more care with the arguments and the structure, and also to try to promote more of an intersectional vision of anarchism.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Libertarian Socialist Rants
Anarchism In Four Parts
(Video Series Transcript)
2013

usa.anarchistlibraries.net