

Draft Proposal on the State

Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation

March 1997

WE ARE ENEMIES OF THE STATE. The State — the police, the army, the prisons, the courts, the various governmental bureaucracies, legislative and executive bodies — is the enforcer and regulator of authoritarian rule. These structures provide the means with which to maintain control in a class-divided society and enforce patriarchy, white supremacy, ecological destruction, and other forms of domination. The State is inherently authoritarian. It represents the interests of the rich against the poor. It is run by representatives — self-selected and sharing a similar ideology-ratified by the increasingly diminishing percentage of the population that bothers to vote. The State is not democratic, in the best sense of the word, but elitist. It is a specialized institution standing above the rest of society, alienated from and oppressing most of the population.

The State maintains a monopoly on violence, coercion, and surveillance in the service of the interests of the elite. Whether it is their police shooting down poor people of color in the streets or the more systematic elimination of the Black Panther Party and American Indian Movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, the State will not hesitate to destroy those who dare oppose it.

Despite these obstacles we are anti-statists. Opposing State power is an absolute principle of our revolutionary practice and one of the most defining elements of our anarchism. The repressive apparatus of the State cannot be defeated by obeying its laws. For this reason we believe it is essential to actively meet State repression with organized solidarity and resistance. There is a spectrum of resistance possible within a political context. From our commitment to defending each other against arrest at demonstrations, to providing both legal and political defenses for people brought to trial, to supporting imprisoned revolutionaries, we believe that our commitment to each other is our strongest defense against the power of the State. We demand the release of all political prisoners and prisoners of war, but we also work for the abolition of the prison system.

Because we have grown up in a statist society, it is often difficult to imagine not living in one. One demonstration of the power of the State is the fact that it has so colonized our imaginations as to make itself seem natural, leaving us unable to think of a different way. Yet for the majority of human existence we have lived without the State. Initially peoples lived communally, sharing what they had. Early human communities developed a sexual division of labor, with men going out on hunts and for the most part women gathering and taking care of children. Eventually this division became increasingly rigid, and as hunters competed with hunters of neighboring tribes, male warrior groups emerged. Along with the early rise of patriarchal hierarchies other

divisions, such as the old over the young and the hoarding and accumulation of wealth, began to emerge. In time these early stratifications developed into imperial families, complete with their own armies, land, and subjects. These were the precursors of the modern nation-state.

Alongside the development of capitalism arose an entity to serve emerging class rulership in the form of the nation-state. Nation-states were created through the merger of various imperial families, establishing economic units that were geographically cohesive, that shared a common language and culture, and therefore made for a common labor pool and market. The nation-state furnished an ideology of national identity that made it easier to rally people for military adventures their rulers considered profitable. The “common language and culture” of each of these new entities was in no way a natural human community like the early tribes and bands. Rather they were created by brutal conquest such as that of the British over the Irish, Scots, and the Welsh, or the Castilian Spaniards’ conquest of the Basques and the Catalans.

The emergence of the nation-state proceeded from the unification of Spain in 1492 until the 19th century when nationalism emerged as a general phenomenon throughout Europe. Every step of the way the builders of modern States encountered resistance. The indigenous peoples of the Americas resisted the European conquest. Captured slaves from Africa resisted and rebelled every step of the way. In Europe, peasants consistently resisted efforts to force them off their land and into the workshops and factories. The English Diggers seized common lands that the nobility had claimed. The distinct cultures that States have sought to incorporate have fought back, as is the case today in the Basque region and in Northern Ireland

Those running States today, both the ruling classes and their political lackeys, seek to preserve their power. Sometimes to do this they make concessions to strong popular movements that challenge them by engaging in direct action from below. In fact, every major State reform has come in response to the strength and power of grassroots movements. In the United States we can look to the examples of the Reconstruction period in response to slave revolts and the abolitionist movement, or to the civil rights legislation passed in response to the Civil Rights movement. As anarchists, we see State reforms as positive, opening up new space for action. We do not sit back complacently when reforms are won. Historically, winning reforms too often co-opts a movement, as when massive labor strife in the 1930s U.S. was quelled with the legalization of unions. We will not get real freedom as a concession from rulers. We will have to win real freedom for ourselves. We seek a true democracy, where the people run their own lives directly. We do not want a “better” State, or a “smaller” State, as many socialists and even politicians now advocate.

The State is not an instrument of liberation. For this reason we oppose strategies for social change that rely on the power of the State. Whether it is participating in elections, petitioning those in power, or trying to seize State power, we see such strategies as self-defeating. Strategies based on State power either fail to appreciate the need to exercise autonomous power to win demands, set the struggle up for co-optation and sell-out, or give us a new set of rulers.

The Marxist-Leninist strategy of seizing the State to create a “dictatorship of the proletariat” has proven a mockery of social revolution, better resembling the old societies they professed to destroy than the liberatory vision upon which these revolutions were founded. In Russia, for example, the “dictatorship of the proletariat” quickly became the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, as Soviet prisons filled up with anarchists and other left opponents of the new regime and even as the original cadre were systematically eliminated. The way to the Stateless society is not to seize State power, but to completely destroy the State. Contrary to Marx and Marxists, we do not

believe the State will “wither away.” No State has ever done this in any real sense, and we do not see this as likely in the future. On the contrary, modern States, aided by newer technologies, have found more effective ways of spying on, killing, and imprisoning their own populations as a means of controlling those segments of society that pose a threat to the existing social order.

In place of the State, we propose the self-organized community. We advocate that local people affected by decisions should be the ones making them. For larger geographic coordination, say at the regional or continental level, local assemblies can confederate, sending accountable and immediately recallable delegates to present the positions of local communities. All policy would be made by the people in a directly democratic fashion, with the administration of that policy carried out by accountable and recallable bodies to serve various functions. Various experts, those who know how to build bridges, for example, or design alternative energy technologies, would inform the decisions of the assemblies. But ultimately it is the people who decide, not the experts. This way of organizing society would be one part of an overall redistribution of wealth and power, which would fundamentally change our relations to each other. Of course this direct, democratic form of self-governance runs the risk of evolving into a new State, alienated from and above the majority of people; thus constant vigilance and flexibility will be required to prevent the emergence of new elites and an alienated administrative apparatus,

Another dangerous institution will be any sort of military organization developed to defend the gains of the revolution and fight those who would seek to destroy our newfound freedoms. A libertarian armed force will need to be created to fight the revolution and preserve its victories. The anarchist ideal is democratic popular militias, an armed people. Yet to be successful this force will require a certain degree of coordination and even levels of centralization and command. The danger here is that this force too could become an institution above society. In these conditions we advocate only as much centralization and discipline as is temporarily necessary to win the revolution and beat back any counter-revolution with as much internal democracy as is possible. How to strike this balance may not be obvious; it will be a matter of political debate and decision by the people.

The State is born of the conquest of other people. The self-governing community is a creation of the people themselves in the process of overthrowing the State. The free society is characterized by the radical decentralization of all kinds of power. Confederal structures do not rule over communities; they are the means by which communities cooperate.

An anarchist society is not one free of conflict. It is a society in which the resolution of such conflicts is not monopolized by an elite. The structures of a free society would not be mystified as “natural” and never-changing. Rather they would be open to constant modifications in light of changing conditions.

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