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What is Anarchism?

Everything you need to know about anarchism, its connection to decolonisation and how you can join the movement

Muntjac Collective



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Illustration by @blkmoodyboi who says “This illustration aims to represent the power of collective action and anarchism. How it’s about rebelling against an oppressive carceral capitalist system (represented by the chains) but also its about resisting and collective organizing. Using the colours of the anarchist flag this illustration also aims to name how marginalised genders have historically carried these movements.”

What is anarchism?

Anarchism is the unity between means and ends, fighting for freedom in freedom. Anarchism is a philosophy, social movement, lens of analysis, and way of life built on the principles of Prefiguration, Direct Action, Solidarity, Accountability, Mutual Aid and Decentralisation.

The word “Anarchy” takes its origin in the Greek word *anarkhia* meaning “without ruler.” Many anarchists use the term ‘Anarchic’ to describe social relationships, movements or situations without authority or hierarchy.

Anarchists take what’s already present in the free associations between humans and other animals and push it into conflict with the state, its defenders and its false critics. Unlike other anti-capitalists, we reject the notion that the state will liberate us. This is because we understand the state as an organisation with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force over a governed territory, a tool that the ruling class uses to exert their power through domestic and militarised force, legislation, bureaucracy, and other tools of coercion. Anarchists recognise that control of these institutions perpetuates their very existence and therefore agitate for abolition rather than reformism.

Anarchism is realised in everyday acts of generative disruption. A group of hunt saboteurs destroying traps is anarchic; seed bombing a bit of brownfield land is anarchic, too – just as a community tool shed is anarchic, or intervening when you see a stranger being hassled by law enforcement.

No one told you to do it and you certainly weren’t forced to do so: you had the simple desire to help someone else. This simple idea of cooperation without coercion, solidarity without obligation is, in a word, anarchy.

What are some key concepts in anarchism?

Prefiguration.

Anarchists emphasise the unity between means and ends in our daily struggle against the state. This can be found in small groups who awkwardly practice de-arrests in the park at 3am preparing themselves for police violence at demonstrations, while those who shoplift or fare evade have the knowledge to outsmart surveillance in more high-pressure situations, or the know-how on building durable barricades for an illegal rave also protects the squat against eviction.

Direct Action.

Direct action shows us the omnipresence of the state is an illusion. We do not delegate struggle against oppression to ‘experts’ or elected bodies but instead put our money where our mouths are by fighting the state in the streets, rather than from the ballot box every few years. Historically, many anarchists have advocated for Propaganda by The Deed – small acts of personal courage that people can daringly imitate, proliferating the movement through our actions.

Solidarity.

For us, solidarity isn’t just a dry statement, a retweet, or a cute enamel pin. Solidarity is something you can hold in your hands, feel, smell, touch, taste and wield as a weapon against our shared enemies. Anarchists have traveled across continents to support each other and projects with whom we share an affinity. Anarchists have a long history of being imprisoned, repressed and censored; as such we know how important it is to provide support that is material, not vibes-based.

Accountability.

Anarchists advocate that people engage in open critique of each other in order to resist the exploitation of individual freedoms and repair relational violence. *‘what about the rapists?’*

- Haters Cafe
- Brown Recluse Zine Distro
- In The Belly
- Warrior Publications
- Chaung
- Lausan
- Palang Hitam Anarkis (Anarchist Black Cross, Indonesia)
- Bandilang Itim (Black Flag, Philippines)
- K’É Infoshop
- Indigenous Action

- Living Utopia: Anarchism in the Spanish Revolution
- Zoé Samudzi – On A Black Feminist Anarchism
- Ashanti Alston on the Black Panthers and the Zapatistas
- Gord Hill – Indigenous Resistance & Anarchism
- Fell In Love With Fire: A Documentary about the 2019 Uprising in Chile
- Touch The Sky: A video collage reflecting on the raw moments of the 2014 Ferguson (Missouri) riots

Stay Informed:

- Act For Freedom Now!
- Unoffensive Animal
- Unravel
- SansNom
- Switch Off!
- Squat Radar

Organisations to follow:

- Advisory Service For Squatters
- Bristol Anarchist Black Cross
- Hunt Saboteurs Association
- Anarchist Federation (IFA)
- Solidarity Federation
- Clash! Collective

Anarchist approaches to crime & justice by dysophia5 explores anarchist conceptions of accountability further.

Mutual Aid.

Voluntary giving or lending of resources, labour or goods to others in shared community(ies) with the expectation that the whole community will benefit. *Mutual aid* ensures the survival and co-operation of human and non-human life alike.

Decentralisation.

Waging the struggle on numerous fronts with every participant choosing to fight in their way of fighting. Refusing to centralise the movement around one organisation or project is a resilience measure learned from centuries of repression against working class movements. Anarchists participate in the things they're interested in participating, rather than having party leadership order them around. As such there are many tendencies, programmes, perspectives and schools of thought in anarchism.

How is anarchy rooted in decolonial principles?

“Of all ideologies, anarchy is the one that addresses liberty and equalitarian relations in a realistic and ultimate fashion. It is consistent with each individual having an opportunity to live a complete and total life, With anarchy, the society as a whole not only maintains itself at an equal expense to all, but progresses in a creative process unhindered by any class, caste or party. This is because the goals of anarchy don't include replacing one ruling class with another, neither in the guise of a fairer boss or as a party.”

– Kuwasi Balagoon, *Anarchy Can't Fight Alone*

In *Muntjac*, a collective of 4th world anarchists, we recognise the value of anarchist methodologies in our struggles as displaced colonised peoples. We also remember and learn from the anarchic ways in which people from the countries of our origin have struggled against colonialism, both the struggles of the present day and that of our ancestors.

We recognise anarchism in the *Pure Anarchist* movement of interwar Japan, resisting the orientalist conception of docile and economically robotic Asians. We recognise anarchism in the practices of Black resistance, of marronage and slowing down and stoppage, of named and unnamed Black comrades like Lucy Parsons in the “US”, Domingos Parsons in “Brazil”, and the Black anarchist at Whiteways Commune, Gloucestershire in 1910. We recognise the lineage of Black anarchism as squatting, illegalism, autonomous organisation and prisoner support. We recognise anarchism as queer insurrectionists who reject respectability, attack police recruitment offices, gum up church locks, have sex on golf courses, and always *Bash Back!*

We recognise anarchism as antagonistic to the state, rather than seeking reconciliation with any of its institutions. For example, speaking from an Indigenous anarchist feminist perspective, *Tawinikay* said: “Reconciliation can only mean eliminating the conflict by enmeshing Indigenous and settler communities [...] making conflicting positions compatible,” then observing that Marxist historical materialist deemed Indigenous societies were “primitive communism” which needed to evolve through capitalism to achieve respectable communism. She proposes anarchism as a way through and forward, dismantling the centralised state of Canada in favour of self-organised communities in parallel with each other.

Anarchists have been involved in campaigns of solidarity with indigenous struggle. Anarchists like Ricardo Flores Magon influenced *Zapata*, a leader in the Liberation Army of the South, an agrarian movement made up of people who lived

- The Kronstadt Uprising, 1921
- Anarchism In The Spanish Revolution
- Anarchism In Latin America
- Collected Works of Ricardo Flores Magón
- Towards Anarchism In The Philippine Archipelago
- Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution
- Anarchism in Korea
- Prison memoirs of a Japanese Woman

Archives:

- History Is What’s Happening (an Archive of Indigenous Resistance and Anarchism)
- Freedom Archive (an archive of anti-colonial struggle)
- The Sparrows Nest Archive (an archive of Anarchist struggle in the UK)
- Libcom (An archive/blog with anarchist and anti-authoritarian books and zines)

Listen:

- The Final Straw Radio
- Black Autonomy Podcast
- In The Mix Prisoner Podcast

Watch:

- Free Voice of Labour: The Jewish Anarchists

What can you do?

Do:

- Affinity Groups
- Primer

Protect Yourself:

- No Trace Project
- AnarSec

Read:

- Against Innocence: Race, Gender and the Politics Of Safety
- No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy In Defense Of The Sacred
- Breaking The Waves: Challenging the Liberal Tendency within Anarchist Feminism
- Queer Ultraviolence: A Bash Back! Anthology
- A (incomplete) Black Autonomy Reader
- Defend the Territory: Tactics and Techniques for Countering Police Assaults on Indigenous Communities
- The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists
- The Haymarket Tragedy
- History Of The Makhnovist Movement
- The Russian Anarchists

in Indigenous Nahua villages. The *Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca-Ricardo Flores Magón* (CIPO-RFM) and the famous Zapatista movement, named after Zapata, are inspired by anarchism and maintain *friendly relationships with anarchists*.

In Chile, anarchists struggle in *solidarity with the Mapuche*, while in so-called Canada, anarchists fought *alongside Indigenous resistance fighters* against pipelines and the olympics. Leonard Peltier also wrote that anarchists *helped his support committee* in its early days. In Bolivia, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui forwards an Indigenous Anarchist *Critique of Bolivia's 'Indigenous State'*.

In so-called North America, some Indigenous anarchist theorists like Gord Hill (aka Zig Zag), Aragorn!, Ziq and Klee Bernally combined their experiences in the Indigenous resistance movement with anarchist-nihilism.

Formulating theories of Indigenous Anarchism based around a critique of civilisation and the civil or reformist parts of Indigenous resistance movements, instead advocating for an anti-colonial praxis of direct action, community defence and sabotage. Later, a network called the *Indigenous Anarchist Federation* would emerge, producing literature and guides on self-defence, fieldcraft, communication tools and weaponry. *Warrior publications* also published several guides on defence and countering police tactics alongside fieldcraft and reviews of survival equipment.

What are some anarchist schools of thought?

What anarchists do reflects their own desires and needs. As such, anarchists historically and today have always had numerous different tendencies, strategies and perspectives. This has helped the movement constantly challenge itself and evolve over time. We'd outstay our welcome if we listed all these de-

velopments, so we're going to squeeze these dozens of tendencies into three groups: Individualist Anarchism, Insurrectionary Anarchism and Social Anarchism.

It's also worth noting that anarchists don't have to stick to one tendency or school of thought. The idea is that we can evolve our methodologies for what's needed based on experience and desire. As a comrade put it, we're *Individualists* when we're alone, *Insurrectionists* when we're in the streets and *Syndicalists* when we're at the jobs we all hate.

Individualist Anarchism

"Anarchist individualism still means eternal revolt against eternal sorrow, the eternal search for new springs of life, joy and beauty. And we will still be such in Anarchy."

– Novatore, *Anarchist Individualism in the Social Revolution*, 1919

Individualist anarchism is a synthesis of *Nihilism* and *Egoism* which emphasises the full autonomy of the individual. Anarchist individualists still recognise that classes or groups of people are oppressed by social systems like the state or the patriarchy, but they choose to fight these ills themselves, recognising themselves as part of the exploited and excluded without reporting to other people or a 'mass movement' to back them up.

Their participation is according to their individual will. Renzo Novatore, who wrote anarchist-nihilist prose and threw grenades at Italian fascists, explained the anarchist individualist strategy of spreading itself through attack and the reproduction of attack: the affirmation of the self through revolt is what makes life worth living.

- "Anarcho-Capitalism?"

Nonsense! In the 80s, segregationist holocaust deniers like Samuel Edward Konkin III appropriated anarchist terminology, inspired by The Chicago School "Economist" Murray Rothbard's appropriation of the term 'Libertarian' from the anarchist movement, who was then inspired by two-time card carrying fascist Ludwig Von Mises. They decided to meme into existence a contradictory nonsensical ideology and that's kinda it.

- "Anarchism is white."

It's true that anarchism, as a social movement, has its origin in the European labour movement. However, anarchism quickly spread around the world in the 19th century and is now found pretty much everywhere, including distinctly non-white anarchist tendencies.

Which individuals/groups/orgs are practicing anarchy?

In this country, there are dozens of Squats, Housing Cooperatives, Social Centers, Infoshops, Bookstores, Campaigns and Publishing houses run in an anarchic (i.e. anti-authoritarian manner) however it would be wrong to call them all anarchists as many don't subscribe to the term. A few good places to look for projects like this in your area would be:

- Radical Routes, a network of housing and workers cooperatives.
- A Radical Guide, an interactive map of radical projects across the world.

Synthesist anarchists disagree with platformists' desire for tactical and theoretical unity and instead argue that a diversity of positions and methods is better as it allows anarchists to spread into more fields of social struggle.

What are the main misconceptions about anarchism?

- "Anarchism is chaos!"

Well, yes, but actually no. What people tend to conflate is the concept of hierarchy (i.e. an authoritarian structure which places people under the control of another group 'above' them) with the idea of social cohesion. Anarchists, as a rule, aren't massive fans of whatever capitalists want to call "order" (oppression) so often you'll see us talking about how much we love chaos.

- "Anarchists are all Punks."

While it's true that punk has helped spread anarchist ideas across the globe, as a decentralised counter cultural music-based movement with broad anti-authoritarian themes. Not all anarchists are punks and not all punks are anarchists. However, countercultural anarchist punk scenes in South East Asia, the Americas and Europe have introduced tens of thousands of people to anarchism.

- "Anarchists are all anti-theists."

It's true that many early anarchist movements were heretical or anti-theistic, just as many anarchist organisations and movements are and have been religious, there have been and are Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Daoist, Buddhist and Pagan anarchisms.

Insurrectionary Anarchism

"It's easy. You can do it yourself. Alone or with a few trusted comrades. Complicated means are not necessary. Not even great technical knowledge. Capital is vulnerable. All you need is to be decided."

– Alfredo M. Bonnano, *Armed Joy*, 1977

Insurrectionary anarchism is an anarchist practice that focuses on organising attacks. This developed from a critique of the anarchist movement presented by anarchists in Italy during the *Years of Lead* but it should be noted that the methods that insurrectionary anarchists use have existed long before the term was coined. Anarchists like Jean Weir, Alfredo M. Bonnano and publications like *Insurrection Magazine* argued for informal, small, tight-knit groups of anarchists called 'affinity groups' who, if they desired, would organise into informal federations of affinity groups, to coordinate and plan out attacks on the state, its defenders and its false critics.

Insurrectionary anarchists criticize the numbers-based organisations that syndicalist and communist other anarchists advocate for, arguing that since they rely on legitimacy from a perceived 'mass' of people, they are in fact a *dampener on revolt*, not a tool to further it.

Insurrectionary anarchists would later develop a theory called *Autonomous Base Nuclei* to synthesise the model of informal, decentralized networks with broader, larger projects with politically mixed groups. Examples of this include a *campaign* against a military base, an autonomous *trade union* of railway workers struggling against the existing union leadership and the bosses, and the *Switch Off campaign*.

Social Anarchism

This encompasses the various tendencies who believe that the best way to organise for anarchism is to organise a mass

movement. All social anarchists are Communists who explicitly reject statism in favor of worker autonomy as the primary factor that leads to communist social relations, rather than an eventual end goal. For them, communism is the combination of an economic program of social equity founded upon the principles of mutual aid and solidarity with an anarchist program for social revolution that makes it possible.

One organisational tendency is *anarchist syndicalism*, which focuses on the union as the primary vehicle for class conflict. The practice is expanded beyond the workplace to other fronts such as housing and civil rights. Through the creation of non-hierarchical unions, Syndicalists argue that people will discover their own power through expressions of their autonomy both in the struggle to organise and eventually self-manage their workplaces, housing, and other areas of life.

With regard to anarchist communism, two different tendencies include *Platformism* and *Synthesism*. Platformism aims to create a federation with theoretical unity while Synthesism desired more ideological diversity.

Within platformism, Especificist Anarchism developed in a Latin American context during the 1970s. The following diagram maps their idea of influencing social movements through the flow of anarchist militants.

