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23 October 1917

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Why I am an anarchist

Nikolai Ivanovich Pavlov

23 October 1917

I am an anarchist because contemporary society is divided into two opposing classes: the impoverished and dispossessed workers and peasants who have created with their own hands and their own enormous toil all the riches of this earth; and the rich men, kings and presidents who have confiscated all these riches for themselves. Towards these parasitic capitalists and ruling kings and presidents there rose in me a feeling of outrage, indignation, and loathing, while at the same time I felt sorrow and compassion for the labouring proletariat who have been eternal slaves in the vice- like grip of the world-wide *bourgeoisie*.

I am an anarchist because I scorn and detest all authority, since all authority is founded on injustice, exploitation and compulsion over the human personality. Authority dehumanises the individual and makes him a slave.

I am an opponent of private property when it is held by individual capitalist parasites, for private property is theft.¹

¹ The allusion here is to the famous dictum of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 'Property is theft'. A leading French radical, Proudhon (1809–65) was the first major figure to call himself an 'anarchist', and he became one of the founding fathers of the anarchist movement. [PA]

I am an anarchist because I subject to unstinting criticism and censure bourgeois morality as well as false and distorted bourgeois science and religion, which shroud the human personality in darkness and prevent its independent development.

I am an anarchist because I cannot remain silent while the propertied class oppresses and humiliates the propertyless toilers, the workers and peasants. In such circumstances only corpses can remain silent, not live human beings.

I am an anarchist because I believe in the truth of the anarchist ideal, which seeks to liberate mankind from the authority of capitalism and the deception of religion.

I am an anarchist because I believe only in the creative powers and independence of a united proletariat and not of the leaders of political parties of various kinds.

I am an anarchist because I believe that the present struggle between the classes will end only when the toiling masses, organised as a class, gain their true interests and conquer, by means of a violent social revolution, all the riches of the earth. Having accomplished such an overthrow and having abolished all institutions of government and authority, the oppressed class must proclaim a society of free producers which will endeavour to satisfy the needs of each individual, who must in turn give society his labour and his concern for the welfare of mankind.

I am not deluded by the loud and vulgar 'socialist' phase of 'dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'. Dictatorship is a synonym for authority, and authority is something alien to the masses. Authority always and everywhere corrupts the rulers, who play the role of flies on the horns of an ox in a pasture, poisonous flies which from time to time bite the ox and contaminate its blood, draining its energy and killing its independent initiative.

I firmly believe that the authority will disappear with the disappearance of capitalism. The popular masses themselves will conduct their affairs on equal and communal lines in free communities.

I am an anarchist because I strive by my own personal initiative to impress upon the masses the idea of anarchist communism. I interpret communism in the full sense of the word, for I shall find my own happiness in the common happiness of free and autonomous men like myself.