

State and Democracy

A Workers Solidarity Movement Position Paper

Workers Solidarity Movement

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Anarchists reject the current political system. In short we oppose the state but fight for real democracy.

1. What is the State?

1. The current political system is one defined by the institution or collection of institutions known as the state. The state has many definitions.
2. It is a coercive institution whereby a minority rules the majority.
3. It is the monopoly on the legitimate use of force.
4. The state is basically a professional group of people, much smaller than the total population, with an established set of practices who tell other people what to do. Most do what they're told because they believe in the authority of the state or depend on its resources, or fear retribution, and those who don't obey are punished as a warning to other would-be rebels.
5. The state has the innate tendency to centralise and bring more and more aspects of society under its jurisdiction and hence control.
6. We know the modern state by its 'political' decision making bodies, such as parliaments, local councils, royalty, along with its unelected bureaucracy which administers the system across governments, its system of laws adjudicated by courts and enforced by police, its military, its borders with other states, and its running of various businesses and services. This can be summarised as legislature, executive, judiciary, military, and administration.
7. The state has existed in different forms for thousands of years. However, it is not a natural and inevitable fact of human society, existing roughly 1% of the time humans have been around. For close to 200,000 years humans lived without the state, generally being understood to have arisen so the privileged could organise warfare and manage the social inequality which arose when human societies began to produce a material surplus.
8. In its modern form the state has only existed for couple of hundred years. That nation state has changed significantly in the past century to adopt service provision and welfare roles as one of its core expectations. This was a compromise to avoid socialist revolution.
9. The state presents itself as a 'nation'. The nation ties the organs of the state into a wider cultural phenomenon. The formation of a nation state involves forcing a uniform national 'culture' on people, an official genetic lineage, religion, language, history, and artistic tradition. Hence the nation is inherently divisive and exclusionary. The residents of a nation have an expected duty to that particular nation above any other. This is the basis of nationalism.

2. Why Anarchists Reject the State

1. Anarchists reject the state for many reasons.

2. We oppose the state on a direct ethical basis because the state is a largely unaccountable gang of strangers who control our lives without our consent. The liberal notion of a 'social contract' is an illusion.
3. Anarchism is defined by the opposition to hierarchy, i.e. relationships of power, and the state is a rigidly hierarchical institution which ties other power systems together.
4. The state allows for the widespread entrenchment of prejudice and discrimination by use of institutional force. Without the state, patriarchy, racism, and ableism, would have a much weaker grip on human society. The state is ultimately the enemy of every oppressed person.
5. The division of global human society into separate nation states forces people of different nations to compete against each other needlessly in pursuit of the narrow national interest, instead of unleashing enormous value by co-operating and instead of recognising our common cause against the class system, war, racism, queerphobia, sexism, and ableism.
6. The state is a dull, inefficient, irrational, institution which causes stagnation in society.
7. It deprives the vast majority of us of our initiative. As a centralised institution, the state deprives us of community and the opportunity to work together as equals. Hence it encourages apathy, ignorance, passivity, mutual suspicion, and loneliness.
8. Concentrating power is an atrocity waiting to happen, and so power should be spread out, or de-centralised, as much as practicable.
9. We reject the old attitude of liberals and authoritarian socialists alike, that without the state humans couldn't work together on a large scale, being that most people are too stupid and lazy, and need to be lead and forced not to rip each other to shreds. Humans have demonstrated well enough that we don't require a central authority to peacefully and creatively co-exist.
10. We remember that much of what we now most value in the state was originally created by volunteers, such as ambulances, fire brigades, and public libraries, as well as fought for tooth and nail by social movements, such as environmental and health and safety regulation.

3. State and Revolution

1. As revolutionaries, anarchists assert it's impossible to use the state to reform our way to liberty.
2. Equally we are against seizing the state to further revolution. We have a unique approach to the state to both because destroying the state is a key objective of revolution in its own right and because the state is a counter-revolutionary institution.
3. This sets us apart from authoritarian socialists who critique the capitalist state but accept the state by itself — whether formally or just in practice — as a neutral institution which

can be used to further the aims of communist revolution if in the hands of the working class, or more accurately in the hands of the revolutionary party which claims to represent the class.

4. History has proven again and again that when socialists seize the state it leads to the red bureaucracy or socialist tyranny which anarchists predicted decades before the USSR proved it in reality.
5. The Leninist idea that the state will 'wither away' after proletarian revolution is pure idealism and doesn't bear out in practice (or make sense in theory).
6. We do not see a state operated by a socialist ruling class, such as that suffered in the USSR, Maoist China, or Cuba, as any improvement over capitalism. We work to overthrow capitalism because we want to be free, which means no rulers whether capitalist or socialist. We would be fighting for revolution, against alienation, within the USSR as much as within the USA or Ireland today.
7. Furthermore, the state in the hands of socialists has been instrumental in crushing worker self-management and maintaining a form of state capitalism instead. This tragic error has been repeated enough times for us to consider the case closed on this issue.
8. Our strategy for revolution is broadly to create the new world within the shell of the old. A real revolution can only happen from the bottom up. It can't be forced from the top down by an enlightened elite. This means building our own grassroots, democratic counter power of workers' councils and neighbourhood councils which will replace capitalism and the state.
9. Thus an integral part of anarchist revolution is 'smashing' the state when the opportunity arises. That means that in a revolutionary upheaval where democratic working class institutions have gained enough power to rival capitalist institutions (a dual-power situation), the working class should dismantle the state and take over the running of society with our own self-managed collective bodies. Otherwise we risk being crushed by the state.
10. The only way to abolish the state is to take over its valuable functions, disrupt its operation, and undermine its legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of people, replacing that with the legitimacy of libertarian institutions. That legitimacy must be formally declared without qualms when it becomes possible.
11. The fundamental role of the police is to repress the working class in the service of the ruling class. As such we don't see police as ordinary workers, but as class enemies.

4. Anarchism and Democracy

1. We oppose the state but seek to create a new highly organised society which is truly democratic.
2. Anarchists advocate for democracy because in a society it is necessary to make decisions together, and democracy is the fairest and most effective method of doing so.

3. The real democracy we advocate is often called ‘direct democracy’ or ‘participatory democracy’.
4. Democracy is based on the principle that people should have a say in decisions in proportion to how much they’re affected. Therefore, decisions should be made at the lowest effective level in society, for example in the neighbourhood assembly rather than in parliament.
5. Hence democracy is not mob rule. True democracy must respect personal freedom and dignity. For example, straight people should have no say in what gender someone else’s romantic partner can be.
6. As democracy is the best form of collective decision making, it belongs as much in the workplace (‘economic democracy’) as in the general political decision making bodies (‘polity’).
7. The organs of so-called ‘democracy’ in statist society are not democratic in a meaningful sense.
8. Modern ‘representative’ democracy was developed in the transition between feudalism and capitalism as a way for the most privileged in society to still rule while giving the appearance of democracy to appease the masses. It was never intended to be democratic. This is illustrated by the fact that the first representative democracies only allowed property owning men to vote.
9. Democracy is self-rule, not picking rulers.
10. Real democracy requires that the overwhelming majority of the population regularly discuss and make decisions together. This is in stark contrast to every 4–5 years picking which tiny group of strangers will make decisions about our lives far away from us.
11. In order to have large-scale democracy, we favour a system of delegates rather than ‘representatives’. Delegates are people chosen to obediently convey the views of the people who elected them. Those views are called a ‘mandate’. Delegates can be immediately recalled, or otherwise penalised, for breaking this mandate. This can be scaled up across larger regions and numbers of people in a similar fashion.
12. A large scale contemporary example of this direct, delegate-based, participatory, democracy is TEV-DEM in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (Rojava), but history abounds with examples of direct democracy in action. The Paris Commune showed it could work back in 1871. Other examples of varying character include the factory councils and peasant communes of revolutionary Russia and Ukraine 1917–20, the CNT neighbourhood and workplace councils in Spain 1936–7, Hungary ‘56, and the Zapatistas 1994–today, among others.
13. The democratic organisation of human society doesn’t require political borders between regions. They are a fantasy, and responsible for the deaths of thousands of migrants, as well as even more in violent geopolitical conflicts. We are working towards a borderless planet — as it is seen from outer space — with freedom of movement for all.

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