

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



Zaher Baher

Our struggle must go beyond what our lifestyle demands

June 2017

<https://libcom.org/library/>

[our-struggle-must-go-beyond-what-our-lifestyle-demands](https://libcom.org/library/our-struggle-must-go-beyond-what-our-lifestyle-demands)

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

Our struggle must go beyond what our lifestyle demands

Zaher Baher

June 2017

The world still suffers from the current economic crisis that started in 2008. It has not only made the vast majority of us poorer and our life harder but has limited our freedoms as well. In the meantime the number of visible and invisible wars increases and the number of victims goes up. Despite this, the leftist, communist, socialist and the anarchist movements have not gone forward.

When I attend meetings, I often hear the phrase ‘anarchist movement’. I question if the ‘anarchist movement’ exist anywhere?

In my opinion after the Spain civil war of 1936 to 1939 there has not been any anarchist movement anywhere in the world. What we had or we have are just a few strong anarchist organisations. In France and Greece there were some street activities but I could not call them a ‘movement’.

Of course, there are many reason for this. In this article I point out a couple of major weaknesses of the anarchists in Europe in general and in the UK in particular that to a certain extent are slowing down our efforts and struggle towards the ‘movement’.

- Far from organising ourselves:

We cannot deny the role and impact organisations play in the movement. Of course, I am talking about non-hierarchical organisation. It is true in history in many places there were many major popular uprisings and movements without people organising themselves before. However, these movements or uprisings have either been brutally suppressed or have not achieved and major changes. In fact most of them made the system stronger.

Although one of the main principles of anarchism is individual freedom and work on achieving it, at the same time anarchism strongly believes in working, struggling and living collectively while still the freedom of the individual is protected. Working and living together does not restrict it. In my opinion the relation and link between individual freedom and working, living, struggling collectively is very strong and to certain extent one completes the other. In other words weakening one of them weakens the other.

Life under this brutal system imposed many commitments and obligations over every individual in society. If any of us wants to breach some of those obligations and commitments we have to pay the price in certain way.

The present system has been formed on the basis of brutality, exploitation inequality, poverty, unsocial justice, war and its law and order to make the individual subject or obey to these rules. At the same time, all of these give us enough evidence that this system cannot be changed without us organising ourselves. We need to organise ourselves, we need to have our short and long term plans, our aims and strategies. Without the above it is not possible to bring about the major changes we want. This is why it is important for anarchists to organise themselves in non-hierarchical groups and organisations they think suit them best.

Self-organising alone, concentrating on only one single issue and keeping our distance from other groups and not doing activities together might achieve what the group formed for, but it will never change the system or even make a major change in soci-

countries. This culture, in every way, is in the interest of capitalism so that if anarchists, as individuals or groups, do not reject it and do not stand against it, it is impossible to take anarchism even one step forward.

As far as I know, although individualism is against authority and the system, it seems to go well with them and their culture. The system wants us to live and remain alone, not having contact with one another, concerned about our own problems and not those of others. You, yourself comes first and everyone else second. Having a certain lifestyle that does not interfere with the system, not organising ourselves, and sticking with a kind of life that we have chosen or has been chosen for us: this is the culture that the present system maintains and tries to promote through its powerful Media. Without this culture the system cannot renew itself and survive. So individualism is protecting the current culture that breaks down relationships and keeps distance between us.

If the basis of anarchism is looking after one another, loving, caring, sharing and giving support and solidarity and also exchanging ideas, knowledge and experiences, then there is no doubt that individualism, whatever its reasons, its form and sources does not serve anarchism as much as it serves the present capitalist system.

ety. Nowadays engaging in single issue without politicalising it serves the system. It will serve the big society that David Cameron claimed when he came to power in 2010. We should support the cases that the people suffering on their hand whatever they are, not just supporting the people who suffers. There are so many single issues: refugees, migrants, homelessness, gentrification, food bank, different housing issues. Comrades work on them but most do not politicalise the issue effectively or do not link up with other groups and do not coordinate our campaigns well enough.

Working on a single issue without radicalising the issue and the people who suffers only benefits the state and the system. Are we just doing work for the state to reduce people's tensions, angers and their frustration to make them totally dependent? By working for free are we taking financial responsibility off the state, and replacing workers by doing voluntary work? In these circumstances, whatever the good intentions of the individual, the outcomes may be nothing more than self-satisfaction while supporting the State and the system.

Working on a single issue is easy and does not need a lot of effort. In most cases it suits someone own lifestyle, so we need to push ourselves beyond working only on single issues.

Here I refer to Janet Biehl who describes working on single issue well "Yet the history of the left has shown that strictly single issue movements are limited as well. To be sure, they have significance for protesting particular injustices, but the results they yield are minimal in proportion to the growing social and ecological changes that are necessary. Above all, they do not provide a program for building the ongoing institutions that are necessary for reconstruction of society. Nor have they consciously aimed to create a political arena in which democratic activities could become a permanent presence in everyday life" Janet Biehl, *The Politics of Social Ecology*, Page 141.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6YOyGNakE86b3Rly2RZN0dySUE/view?usp=sharing>

- Individualism and Lifestyle

Individualism is another branch, and another weakness, of anarchism. It first appeared strongly in the 19th century and was advocated by many anarchists. Individualism defends the freedom and autonomy of the individual and it has benefited from anarchist principles that believe strongly in the freedom of the individual. This idea has been used by many anarchists to enjoy their freedom, to be active individually and keep their distance from having to take action collectively. In other words anarchists are the victims of a misinterpretation of anarchism. This has been justified by anarchists thinking that collective work or activities are not compatible with individual freedoms and their independence. This tendency is directly or indirectly against any kind of commitments in organising and activities. This kind of individualism to a large extent serves the current system more than it serves the anarchist movement.

Individualism contradicts one of the major aims of the anarchism which is building the communes and living inside the communes. Communes are the outcome of collective activities, based on support, solidarity and mutual relationships with other communes that exist. Such communes cannot be built upon the idea of individualism. Communes and their autonomy should be seen in practising inside the framework of support, duty and very strong relationship between them, otherwise the commune will be isolated, marginalised and will not last long.

The individualism we see nowadays may believe in working class struggle but with the attitude of not participating in, or committing itself to, the movement it remains lonely and ineffective. While anarchism is love, concern, sharing, working and living collectively, individualism is only concerned about its own autonomy and lifestyle, so the distance between them remains wide.

A couple of centuries ago, when individualism claimed personal autonomy (autonomy is different from freedom) one could have enjoyed it. At that time the system and its influences were not as

strong as they are now. Presently every individual is connected to the system, in many ways that make life extremely difficult. In other words in some ways the individual have been deprived from his/her own freedom.

Today the Ecology question has become a major issue in the anarchist movement or revolution. I was wondering what is the attitude of the individualist to this? What is individualisms role and how will individualists take part and push forward the ecology question? In my opinion as long as individualism sticks with its idea, it will be extremely hard for them to have a considerable role in this matter.

Bakunin and Kropotkin talked about the freedom of the individual and individualism. Both of them insist that the freedom of the individual and social anarchism are compatible with one another and they are not against each other. Kropotkin was against the individualism of Max Sterner and called it "elitism". Bakunin was more concern with social anarchism, in his book, Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 158, he says. "Even the most wretched individual of our present society could not exist and develop without the cumulative social efforts of countless generations. Thus the individual, his freedom and reason, are the products of society, and not vice versa: society is not the product of individuals comprising it; and the higher, the more fully the individual is developed, the greater his freedom -- and the more he is the product of society, the more does he receive from society and the greater his debt to it"

Individualism is against authority but it marginalises itself when it focuses mainly on individual freedom at the expense of collective action, activities, political and social self-organisation, so the idea remains impractical.

Another negative side of individualism for me is its support for the current culture, while the socialist/anarchist revolution is incomplete without including culture. The duty of anarchists is to reject the current culture, which is the culture of the system that covers the whole of Europe, America and the other industrialised