

Do Anarchists Support “Free Speech”?

ziq

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“Doublespeak is language that deliberately obscures, disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words. Doublespeak may take the form of euphemisms (e.g. “downsizing” for layoffs, “servicing the target” for bombing, in which case it is primarily meant to make the truth sound more palatable. It may also refer to intentional ambiguity in language or to actual inversions of meaning. In such cases, doublespeak disguises the nature of the truth.”

The concept of “free speech” is fundamentally flawed, and has historically been used to convince citizens of states that they have “rights” that are gifted to them by the supposedly benevolent and generous state.

In actuality, the state doesn’t give you rights; it controls them, limits them, denies you them. It uses its monopoly on violence to censor, stalk, spy on, imprison and terrorize anyone that would threaten to subvert its power.

When an authority grants you “free speech”, what they’ve really done is take away your freedom to speak, and then allow certain people (typically the favored social class) to say certain things under certain conditions. There’s nothing “free” about this. You’re still forbidden from speech that would threaten the state or those it empowers. You’re still legally viable for slandering powerful people that can afford as many lawyers as it takes to sue you into bankruptcy. You’re still beaten to a bloody pulp (or worse) for talking back to a cop. You’ll still be imprisoned, enslaved and murdered by the state and its enforcers for being the wrong race or the wrong gender or the wrong sexuality or the wrong religion or the wrong class and daring to resist your oppressors.

Free speech is a lie told to us by our rulers to convince us we need to be ruled by them.

Anarchists are aware enough to realize the state does not grant us any kind of freedom. The entire existence of the state is predicated on taking freedom away from us to empower the rich and powerful minority that the state exists to serve. So as anarchists; as people who don’t want to be ruled, people who see the blatant lies our rulers tell us for what they are, it would make little sense for us to support an inherently Orwellian concept as “free speech”. Much more honest words for this concept would be “controlled speech” or “state-approved speech”.

Really, when the state talks about freedom of speech, they’re most often talking about the freedom to be a hateful bigot — since bigotry is really the only type of speech the state will go

out of its way to protect. Bigotry allows the state to scapegoat undesirable groups and thus create gaping social divisions. If everyone is villainizing migrants or gays, those groups will serve as a fine distraction. Ensuring our rulers and their benefactors can live to exploit us for another day as we focus our rage at anyone but them.

According to the state, white supremacists are free to incite hatred against non-whites (which has often led to mass murder), but if someone were to say they think the president of the nation deserves to be stabbed for his crimes... Well, that person would promptly be carted off to prison for voicing such a dangerous idea.

Unfortunately, some people insist on using bigoted or otherwise oppressive language in anarchist spaces, claiming that free speech allows them to do so. Since we've established that free speech is nothing more than an insipid lie our rulers tell us in order to control us, it's important that we reject the dishonest language of the state when talking about anarchy, and take a long hard look at the reasons someone would have for clinging to the state's shrewd promises of "rights" and "freedoms" that simply don't exist.

"Free speech" is not an anarchist principle in any way. Actual anarchist principles of course include direct action, mutual aid, taking a strong stance against authority in all its guises, as well as freedom of association. This means we are free to associate with whoever we want and free to avoid associating with people that would build authoritarian structures to oppress us.

So let's talk about the people who enter anarchist spaces, direct slurs and hateful bigoted rhetoric at us, and then insist we accept their abuse because they have the sacred right to freedom of speech... These people simply have no understanding of anarchy. Their "right to free speech" that they insist we respect could only be granted to them by a state with a monopoly on violence. If someone comes into your space and calls you a racial slur, no institution should have the power to stop you from showing that person the door.

It takes an incredibly sheltered person to believe there should be no consequences for abuse. When someone is abusing you or people you care about, you should absolutely be free to take a stand and remove them from your space, no matter how many times the person cries "free speech!" as they're telling you you're a worthless (slur).

The "freedom" to scapegoat, demonize and demean people who are different from you really stands in direct contradiction with anarchy. Discriminating against people based on ability, race, gender or sexuality creates authority. It makes you an authoritarian. Your rhetoric directly alienates the people who belong to the groups you're choosing to look down on in disgust and present as less-than human. By using demeaning language to chastise marginalized people for their perceived inadequacies, you're upholding normative social roles, creating classes and subclasses and strengthening the authoritarian power structures that directly oppress any people that belong to minority groups.

For example, by using the word "faggot" as an insult, you effectively cast gay people as being worthy of scorn and derision. You assert authority over everyone who isn't heterosexual and make life incredibly difficult for people that don't meet the normative standards you've helped construct to maintain the social dominance of heterosexuals.

Anarchists can and will choose to not associate with people that claim they have a right to oppress others. Anarchists are anti-authoritarian to our core, and this means we don't have to put up with hateful bigots in our spaces.

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