

# ANARCHISM-*VS*-CAPITALISM

Historically and currently the Anarchist Movement has consisted overwhelmingly of socialists. Today for instance there are Anarchist organizations of over 10,000 members that are also trade unions in Sweden and Spain. There are many other organizations with memberships in the hundreds in most countries world-wide. All of these organizations are explicitly anarchist, revolutionary and Anti-Capitalist.

When we come to looking at North America however we find a curious thing. Since the mass expulsion and criminalization of Anarchists in the period during and after the first world war there has been no major Anarchist movements in Canada or the US.

This has created a curious situation where Pro-Capitalist utopians feel comfortable calling themselves "Libertarians" (e.g. the Libertarian Party, a Neo-Liberal political party in the United States which advocates *Laissez Faire* Capitalism with a "Caretaker State"), "Anarchists", "or Anarchist Capitalists". These people seem to be particularly dominant in the white, university-educated Upper Middle Class and as such have a voice far outweighing their support due to the presence of agitation from corporate-funded right-wing "think tanks." (Access to universities is now dominated by the Middle and Upper Middle Class due to cuts in student grants and tenure for faculty is influenced by increasing dependent on corporate donations, although there are exceptions to this). It is strange that they would call themselves Libertarians because in the rest of the world this word is most commonly followed by the word socialist or communist. The term "Libertarian" was adopted by the French Anarchist movement after the French government outlawed the use of the term "Anarchist." It is also strange that they would use the term "Anarchist" since Anarchists have always fought **against** Capitalism and for working people and their families.

Now I find the use of the term "Anarchist" by these people to be insulting to all that Anarchists have stood for and continue to fight for. It is the case that Capitalism has killed, imprisoned or executed at least one million Anarchists from the aftermath of the Paris Commune of 1871 to the concentration camps of Lenin, Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Mao. Lets also not forget those Anarchists who have died fighting Capitalism in Mexico, Japan, Korea, Argentina, Chile, Britain, France and even the USA. The use of the term Anarchist by these so-called "Libertarians" spits in the face of all these people and in the face of the tens of thousands of Anarchists fighting Capitalism today.

Now the only way of stopping the misuse of this term is to build a real Anarchist movement in North America so that the word Anarchism becomes fused once more to the idea of revolutionary Anti-State Anti-Capitalist ideas. They will stop using the label pretty fast then. In the meantime lets expose the contradictions between Anarchism and Capitalism.

Anarchism as political movement grew out of the International Workingmen's Association or the 1st International. Immediately before this came into being a Frenchman called Proudhon played a part in the conception of Anarchism when he asked the question "What is Property" and answered it with the simple slogan "Property is Theft". This in a nutshell is the revolutionary socialist theory of how the mechanism of Capitalist exploitation works. It was of course later expanded and formalized by Marx in the Labor Theory of Value (he did actually credit Proudhon too!).

The argument is simple. In order to live under Capitalism it is necessary to work to earn money in order to live. However, due to automation and the high price of machinery as well as the "ownership" of land by an elite few it is not possible to own the tools by which you work. Therefore **most** workers are forced to work for somebody else who has ownership of factories, offices, stores, farms, mines, etc. This is the property referred to as "the means of production." It does not refer to your clothes, your books, your furniture, your CD player, your car or other personal property or consumer goods.

That's the property part, where does the theft come in. The worker working in the factory produces \$600 dollars worth of goods in a week of which \$400 dollars when sold is straight profit for the owner of the machinery. The owner of the machinery then pays the worker \$200 dollars, stealing \$200 for themselves. In this model it is not necessary for the owner to have done any work (some do) all that is necessary is for him/her to own the machinery. This is the theft. This ownership constitutes the Capital. How the owner came across this Capital is also irrelevant in the model, it could have been through working in a fast food joint for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 20 years. Or it could have been wealth passed down through a family ever since great granddad made it by kidnaping people from Africa and selling them in America.

That is the model of Capitalist exploitation. Of course in life we seldom see simple models, a host of other factors are involved from the Capitalist actually doing some productive work to individual workers having a good idea and somehow saving enough money to become capitalists themselves. Such complications do not however contradict the model, the same basic exploitation still runs beneath the surface. Anarchism is about opposing all forms of exploitation and Capitalism as illustrated is a mechanism of exploitation.

In addition Anarchists see most other forms of exploitation as originating and being reinforced by Capitalism. Racism for instance was created and expanded by the early Capitalists to justify slavery and the plundering of the rest of the world by Europe. It is

maintained by capitalism to-day as a way of dividing the workers and justifying imperialism. Again a basic model, life is more complicated, but the basic model although not a complete explanation is at least a clear starting point.

One of the favorite retorts of these right wing utopians who call themselves "Libertarian" or "Anarchist Capitalist" is that if you look up Anarchism in a dictionary you will find a definition that essentially limits it to opposition to government. Very true, but political movements do not flow from dictionaries, they come from history (and dictionaries are written by the capitalists!). A brief discussion of Anarchist history follows later but first lets look at why being Anti-State means you have to be Anti-Capitalist in the first place.

The state is essentially a creation of class society. In a society where one group of people owned more than another then you needed a State to maintain this situation. Under Capitalism the State was transformed from a small body to a huge one. The increase in size was necessary because of the increase in the organization of the non-ruling classes. Capitalism created its own grave-digger in the form of the working class. Under capitalism huge number of people are placed in close proximity under similar if not identical wages and conditions. The possibility for them to act together is thus greatly magnified. At the end of the day the capitalists are outnumbered by well over 20 to 1.

During the miners strike of 1984 in Britain the state spent tens of millions of pounds smashing what was one of the most militant and powerful unions. Over 10,000 police were permanently deployed against the miners for a year and rumors still persist of the military being used (in police uniforms). A series of huge court cases were waged by the State against the National Union of Miners (NUM) in order to seize their funds. The miners lost but without this state deployment they would have won their strike immediately. Similarly whenever workers occupy factories it is the state that moves in, evicts them and arrests the ringleaders. Without the state those of us working would take over our workplaces and evict the bosses within days if not hours.

The State also plays a role in the conflicts between Capitalists. Within a country the State lays down rules about how far individual companies can go in order to make a profit. Can they employ children and if so for how long. The State protects the companies of one country against another through import tariffs or subsidizing exports. In a general sense the State helps all companies by paying for the vital infrastructure in the form of road, education etc. Ultimately the State may seek to protect the companies by declaring war on another state. In short the state is that body by which the individual capitalists come together and form a larger block to work in their common interests. The most important common interest is the suppression of the Working Class. If the State did not exist the libertarians would have to invent it.

To finish with a brief discussion of what defines Anarchism. As I have already said the dictionary does not. Anarchism is above all defined by what Anarchists have said and fought for. Right from the start Anarchists have been socialists. The 1st International was an explicitly socialist body that included Anarchists, Marxists and others. At the same time in the USA Anarchists were involved in the trade unions. Indeed when the Haymarket martyrs were executed in the 1880's for fighting for the eight hour day this was one of the earliest defining features of Anarchism in the USA. From the start Anarchism was a working class revolutionary movement.

The biggest single Anarchist event was the Spanish revolution of 1936. The CNT which was an Anarchist trade union had between 1 and 2 million members which included all sections of the working class in Spanish society. Despite their mistakes the Spanish workers put anarchism into practice as never before. Industry and agriculture were collectivized and ran along Anarchist lines throughout most of republican Spain. We are talking here of millions of workers, probably in the order of 5 million as many who were not members of the CNT joined in the constructive activity. If these so-called "Libertarians" had existed in Spain we might have expected to find themselves either on the side of Franco or perhaps with the Spanish Communist Party which fought against collectivization and used the army to kill or imprison the Anarchists and return collectivized factories and lands to their Capitalist "owners" or the Spanish Socialist Party which instructed banks to cut off credit to the Anarchist militias fighting the Fascists so they couldn't get bullets or keep the factories running.

One further point about Spain. Many libertarians claim socialism means forcing people to work for the state at the point of a gun. In Spain the workers did not work for the state but worked for themselves through the collectives. They elected delegates who made decisions about how the factory/collective farm would be run, a process sometimes called workers self management. These delegates elected others to decide on regional and national planning of industry. Not every one was happy with being part of the collective, particularly some small farmers. Rather than being forced to join it was decided they could work their own land and trade with the collectives providing they employed no one and providing they worked all the land. Land that was unused was confiscated by the collective. Many of these people in fact joined the collectives within months.

When the capitalists came back to power in Spain they destroyed not only the collectives but all those who led the building of them. Perhaps half a million Anarchists were killed by the Spanish capitalists, many more were imprisoned in either France or Spain. The libertarians have nothing in common with those people and their use of the term Anarchist is an insult to their memory.