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HISTORY OF ANARCHISM

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Abstract

The organization of human life and labor can be viewed as a form of technology, one that has been neglected and has lagged behind the times. There is much need for researching alternative organizational models in order to overcome the types of crises the human race faces today. This project organizes and presents the history of an ideology that presents an alternative that seems very viable today. Anarchism proposes the non-hierarchical, non-coercive, free, voluntary and co-operative organization of people.

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Social Organization as a Form of Technology

The 19th and 20th Centuries saw the greatest advancements in Science and Technology in all of human history. Pretty much every area of human knowledge has expanded tremendously and we come up with gadgetry that puts early science fiction to shame. We know more about the composition of a microscopic cell than people used to know about their own bodies. We can store a whole library's worth of text into a shiny flat disc the size of our hands. We can harness the energy of the wind and the sun, we can see and hear someone across the globe and have a conversation with them, we can build bombs that hit their targets with pinpoint accuracy (give or take a few Chinese consulates). It seems we're finally getting to that promised "future."

How is it then that we are plagued by colossal problems for which we supposedly have the knowledge and tools to solve? What good are the dazzling advancements in agriculture we've managed to obtain if people still starve to death? Of what use is it to have highly skilled doctors that know how to treat all sorts of diseases if the sick and dying can't afford to pay these doctors? Why should we care whether we could utilize clean sources of energy if the power to make decisions on energy production is in the hand of those that have vested interests in keeping the old methods around?

Technological and scientific advance that is not coupled with progress in the mode of socioeconomic organization has been and will be fruitless and even harmful to humanity. Someone who believed in historic inevitabilities might suggest that a certain level of technological advancement carries a parallel mode of organization, e.g. hunter-gatherer cultures and anarchism or clan organization; agrarian societies and feudalism; industrial ones and capitalism and so on. This would lead us to think that as technology progresses, social organization will be dragged along inevitably. In other words that if anarchism (or something else) corresponds to the current level of human technological advancement then it will eventually develop and replace capitalism.

The problem with this point of view is that it doesn't take into account coexisting organizational modes among people with similar technological developments and gives us an impression of linear development. It also gives us the impression that social change is independent of human intervention, which the liberal bourgeoisie disproved with their revolutions against feudalism. There's nothing inevitable about history.

Social organization is related to technology in a different way. Social organization can be seen as the first form of technology humans came up with. Before making tools and weapons, people found the need to interact with each other finding roles to claim for their own and for others. In some cases people lived in an egalitarian sort of free communalism. In others the strong and bellicose sought first to steal from the weak and then rule over them. Clans, tribes, families, corporations, guilds, kingdoms can all be seen as technological applications that organize human labor power.

It is because we fail to see the way we organize our social structures as a technology that can be replaced and instead we think them to be intrinsic to human nature. If we can't overcome the ecological crisis, it's not because we don't know enough about the problems, causes and consequences of our pollutants, it's because capitalism is not capable of overcoming this type of problem. If we still have world hunger, it's not because we need to grow more food, it's because it's not in the scope of global corporatism to solve it.

The technology of organization is more clear when it comes to defining the workplace. Who decides what to produce, how much and for whom? Who decides the conditions under which workers carry out their jobs? Who owns the fields, factories and workshops? This isn't limited to work, however. The educational system, the concept of property and even the societal atom called "family" are all questionable and should be thought of as social technologies.

How would things be different if we were to view the way we carried out our lives as technology? For one thing, we'd be intent on improving them. Research and development on decision making processes, societal units, regional organization and so on would be as common as pharmaceutical labs. We'd also be less intent on keeping our own ways. Maybe we won't leave the rearing of a child to more or less exactly

two people. Maybe we'd figure out it really does take a village to raise a child. We certainly wouldn't leave important decisions that affect us all to organizations with a record of making bad choices. We probably would replace that deity called "the Free Market" with more rational technologies like planned production and distribution.

The need for better social technologies, while always present, is even stronger today. Our advancement in other technological fields has allowed us to produce certain goods at zero cost. Software for instance, once developed, can be replicated ad infinitum. However because of our primitive social technologies, we demand that no replications take place unless owners to the rights of the original get remunerated for it over and over. This phenomenon is not limited to the world of ones and zeroes. Everything that is considered information (formulas for medicine, books, music) is subject to the irrationality of primitive capitalist technology.

A rational society would not impede the distribution of a good at zero cost on pretenses of wanting to remunerate the inventor of the good. A rational society might directly remunerate her and allow the zero-cost replication to take place. Or maybe it would remunerate her no differently than it would any other member of the society, providing for the basic necessities for material survival as well as the means for self-actualization.

Movements that are a testimony to this anachronism have sprung up in the way of free open-source developers and cyber-communalists that share their resources at no cost. As these movements exist within a capitalist framework though, it is impossible for them to accomplish any deeper societal impact. The message however, is clear. While we've always had the technology necessary for a free society, only today do we have technology that demands it. This does not mean the free society is a historical inevitability, it just means that there has been an uneven advance between social and material technologies and unless we view the former as a necessary field of research and improvement, the latter will stagnate and even backfire on humanity.

It is because of this need for a free society that I present the anarchist idea and struggle for the stateless egalitarian state. Born from two ideologies that sought in their own way to bring about the free society: liberalism and socialism, anarchism is currently the only alternative to global neoliberalism that doesn't seek to reinvest power to the state and since it's been around for around two centuries we can probably learn something from it.

If a key point of an IQP at WPI is the convergence of technology and society then I consider this a most relevant point, which basically views the way we organize our society as a form of technology. We've reached a point where new technology is needed and anarchism seems like a very viable prototype for a way ahead.

Anarchist Ideas in the Modern Capitalist Workplace

The two main issues concerning the workplace from the classic anarchist (and syndicalist) perspective are control and ownership. Anarchists have usually maintained that workers tend to be more creative and productive when they have a say in how matters are run in the workplace with absolute self-management being the ideal. On the same scale, the issue of ownership over the means of production has been at the heart of the Social Question since socialism began.

The Industrial Revolution stripped workers of both ownership and control as the artisan's workshop was replaced with factories and mills. As capitalism in the first world moved to a great degree out of manufacturing and into service and information, it found that the labor relations that were used in industries were not as effective any more.

The same people that had degraded the labor process to a mindless, repetitive chore were now faced with the issue of instilling some sort of initiative into the workforce. For a long time, the same old "taskmaster"

approach to management was still prevalent (and still is in many places) and even extended, with layers and layers of management managing more layers of management without much increase in overall productivity.

With the advent of the much-hyped Information Age, huge corporate behemoths saw the rise of a myriad of start-ups that forced them to adopt different managerial approaches. Realizing that initiative cannot be forced and that workers couldn't be coerced into being creative, employers reversed tactics and gave labor a good amount of liberty and responsibility as well as a slice of the pie by way of stock options.

Employee ownership is not a new stratagem for getting employees to comply. In the US, after the bitter miner strikes early in the century, at least one company offered the miners a way to become shareholders as a way to discourage radical organizing and anti-company sentiment. Is this process part of the historical inevitability of the process of transferring ownership over the means of production to the workers? Hardly. This question had already been raised around the time of the First International, and was answered somewhat cryptically by Mikhail Bakunin when he said that this process would only increase the number of capitalists. An interpretation to this is that for one thing the capitalist system remains in place, so even though "those that work the mills would own them," income would stem from property and not from labor (which would remain under the wage system).

What about the increasing amount of worker liberty and self-management? Is this an indication of progressive workplace evolution that will lead to the free society? Again, while these changes may seem to indicate some sort of movement towards a more rational mode of organization, since the underlying system would be obsolete these changes would be only slightly more than cosmetic. While not a complete certainty, to me at least, the concept of whither-away capitalism seems highly unrealistic.

Even if we pictured the most advanced capitalist society along these lines, where workplaces are 100% worker-managed and owned, the underlying system of capitalism will cause the workers to act as capitalists first (seeking profit above all), as workers second (seeking to improve their working conditions and terms) and as people that are part of a society last (they would therefore not strive for societal needs). However even this is an overly optimistic picture. Today's currents point to a future where the otherwise benevolent principles of self-management and workplace ownership and control are subverted against the worker, who after having internalized capitalist values becomes her own worst tyrant.

History and its Usefulness

Since the idea that we propose to establish as a viable alternative to capitalism isn't new, we can learn much about those that have pursued it in the past. We should learn history in order to not commit the errors of the past, we're told over and over again. The history we're taught in school doesn't really help us to this end, however.

If we view societies as forms of technology, we can view history as the documentation for that technology. Human experience being an infinite series of events, history is an extremely selective collection of the events that current society seems to deem worth remembering. That alone is a pretty good reason for preserving anarchist history, since a non-anarchist society has very little interest in remembering it. Until the idea becomes reality, it is important to keep the documentation to the technology updated.

The mere fact that anarchist history has survived this far is pretty surprising. Both capitalist and socialist states have pretty much erased all evidence of anarchism from popular movements (unless it's necessary to somehow mar someone's reputation by calling him an anarchist). The Haymarket massacre becomes a mere labor struggle for the 8 hour day, the 60's become a decade of protest against exactly ONE war, the Spanish Civil war becomes a face-off between commies and fascists. Although to some degree verbal communication of our history has occurred, I think we have the scholarship of the anarchist intellectuals to thank for.

Most classic anarchist texts have been preserved mainly because among scholarly circles they're considered of tremendous significance (especially after scholars of the left ran out of Marxist philosophers

to be subjects of theses and dissertations). Proudhon, Kropotkin, Bakunin, Godwin and the rest of the classics are all held in quite high regard. It's not that these works constitute anarchist history (although to an extent they do), but the texts give us tremendous insight on the state of things at the time. It's almost impossible to read a collection of Bakunin's work without learning the flip side of Marx and Engels from Bakunin's denunciations of the antiauthoritarian left.

Other books, even those by non anarchist authors, written around the times when events of anarchist significance happened (as long as we keep in mind where the author of the book is coming from). Thus, *Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell becomes one of the few first hand accounts of the Civil War written in English and probably the only one that mentions anything of importance regarding the anarchists and as the subject of anarchism gains popularity such peripheral books become more widely read.

Once a topic becomes fair game for history scholars, we are treated to a series of research papers and books on even the less well-known aspects of those topics. Thanks to this we see mainstream publishers willing to put out a 500+ page book called the *Haymarket Tragedy*, which under normal circumstances might receive some mention in a book on American labor.

These are some of the books I used for this project, from all three of the categories mentioned above:

The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin, edited by Peter Marshall. After reading this I was amazed by how far ahead of his time William Godwin was. Almost every anarchist topic to ever be brought up in the past two centuries is discussed by Godwin from a libertarian perspective before anarchism was even around.

Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, edited by Steward Edwards, translated by Elizabeth Fraser. This book is out of print. It offers a great selection of letters, excerpts and essays by Proudhon. Reading some of the texts I realized why Proudhon was so important for anarchism and also why he is so seldomly read nowadays. Proudhon not only attacked the State but also hierarchy per se. However his texts are splattered with gratuitous antisemitism and other reminders of the Dark Ages and it's therefore extremely hard to read his very progressive and advanced ideas alongside very retrograde comments.

Malatesta – Life and Ideas, edited by Vernon Richards. Propaganda texts and memoirs by one of Italy's finest anarchists. Malatesta's anarchism is similar to Kropotkin, except it's less gentle and scientific and is much more emotional and even visceral at times.

The Conquest of Bread, Peter Kropotkin. The closest thing to an anarchist-communist manifesto. In this book Kropotkin addresses production, distribution and day-to-day life in an anarchist commune.

Anarchist Portraits, Paul Avrich. A collection of short biographies of anarchists around the world by my favorite anarchist historian. This book is particularly special because of the unusual angles it takes on traditional anarchist characters, the focus on the interaction between Bakunin and Nechaev or the work of Kropotkin in America come to mind.

Anarchy – Graphic Guide, Clifford Harper. A very straightforward introduction to the history of anarchism. Beautifully illustrated by the author. The overall organization of anarchist history in this book is excellent.

Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution, Jose Peirats. This is the first and foremost book on the Spanish anarchist revolutionaries. Almost every other book on the subject cites this one. Comes with some pretty rare pictures of the Spanish war and revolution.

The New Left – A Collection of Essays, Priscilla Long, editor. This is a great collection that provides a decent idea of what the "movement" used to be about. Even contains essays by 3 anarchist favorites, Rudolf Rocker, Noam Chomsky and Paul Goodman. It also has a great story by a nine-year old.

Worker-Student Action Committees – France May '68, R. Gregoire, F. Perlman. A brief history of the short-lived worker/student movement that almost caused a second French Revolution. Includes tons of reproductions of cartoons, posters and pamphlets that attacked government, police and union leaders.

Profane Existence – Making Punk a Threat Again! A collection of articles from the classic anarcho-punk 'zine Profane Existence. This book helps dispel the idea that punk is only about getting drunk and spiking your hair. Punk is about getting drunk, spiking your hair AND smashing the state, patriarchy and capitalism.

Elements of Refusal, John Zerzan. Serves as a very nice introduction to Zerzan and primitivism. In this book, Zerzan attacks agriculture, numbers and even language as oppressive ideas. It might not make you agree with primitivism but the clear presentation will help you understand it a lot better.

Besides books, since anarchism has to a very high degree been co-opted and stereotyped in the mainstream, it's from elements that somehow made it to the mainstream that anarchists today first came into contact with anarchism. Perhaps a young woman buying into the whole "retro" phenomenon of the new hippies decides to check out beat poetry, where she learns about Sacco and Vanzetti or the Spanish anarchists. Or perhaps someone introduced to the mainstream's rehash of punk starts to listen to some of the older bands that influenced today's punk and hears of the anarchist opposition to Margaret Thatcher transmitted across a couple of decades into his present-day mp3 player.

If anarchism has shown a resilience to have its history being wiped out against terrible odds, now that the Information Age is upon us, we have no excuse for not beginning to write our own history, one that will not be lost to future generations.

Why a Website?

Utilizing this newly developed, near-zero-cost dissemination technology called the Internet seems like a no-brainer these days. Sure, it's biased towards class and acquisitive power, since even if the very poor have access to the internet via public libraries (in some of the better-off countries at least), they probably do not have the leisure time or inclination to learn software that has been developed for mid-upper class consumption (the whole commercial side of the internet). However, by process of elimination we can quickly see that any other mean not only erects more barriers for minimal circulation but also sets limits on the expected span of the dissemination we can expect.

Another reason why I considered an on-line guide/history of anarchism to be the best option is that in print form these topics are already covered by people far more capable and knowledgeable than me. Web sites on anarchism (although numerous), while usually loaded with valuable archived texts and images, don't normally offer a sort of overall view of anarchism and its history. With the increasing number of adherents to the libertarian ideology at least partly due to Internet dissemination of propaganda, it makes sense to offer a site providing a broad background of the movement.

One other major advantage web sites have over their hard copy counterparts is the ability to link to other web sites. Referring people to books that might be out of print or hard to get has been a problem with anarchist books in the past and even though most anarchist classics are back in print, they're not quite yet available at mainstream bookstores. Online anarchist materials are readily available and are quite easy to link to, so this simplifies reference quite a bit.

As far as the organization of the site goes, while the bulk of the site is taken up by the history of anarchism, the

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