

Entirely in contrast to the popular conception, anarchism is probably the most idealistic and peaceful of political theories. As a philosophy it assumes a system in which the individual is free and living in peace; it looks forward to a time when human beings can coexist within a framework of voluntary associations. *The Dictionary of Misinformation*

anarchist discussion forum

FOR THE LAST four years Jon Purkis has been responsible for co-ordinating the occasional series of discussion papers which became known as the Anarchist Discussion Forum. Originally conceived as an offshoot of the London-based Anarchist Research Group, the approximately quarterly meetings have generated a wide range of interest on a variety of contemporary themes. Due to other commitments he is no longer able to keep the ADF going, but has a mailing list and contacts at sympathetic venues. Anyone interested in co-ordinating future meetings can contact Jon on 01484-847366.

One notable outcome of the meetings is a book *Twenty-First Century Anarchism: Unorthodox Ideas for a New Millenium*, edited by Purkis & Bowen, published by Cassell and due out in March 1997.

why we are not marxists - part 1 of an occasional series

'IN 1974, The Eat the Rich Gang helped organize a successful demonstration against an assemblage of Detroit's wealthy and distributed a cookbook we had produced for the event entitled, "To Serve the Rich". It contained recipes calling for human ingredients [and dishes] named after long gone politicians and corporate heads.

A disdainful Marxist we knew advised us we'd have better spent our time on a pamphlet about socialism. "Socialism is about work", he sternly reprimanded us. "I thought it was about ecstasy", I said. "No." he assured me. We took him at his work and looked elsewhere for a political philosophy.'
from *The Fifth Estate*, Detroit, U.S.

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THE YORKSHIRE ANARCHIST



The danger of the past was that we became slaves. The danger of the future is that we may become robots. True enough, robots do not rebel. But given our nature, robots cannot live and remain sane; they will destroy their world and themselves because they cannot stand any longer the boredom of a meaningless life.
with acknowledgement to Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*

freedom from the state - if it's good enough for anarchists...

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THE FAMILY IS BACK! At least it is if you believe the Tories and their chums New Labour. Lots of measures are being peddled to try and get us back into our boxes, cash windfalls for us if we get married, lots of positive press for staying so and penalties if we dare to separate such as the restrictions in benefits for lone parents announced in the November budget.

What are we to make of all of this? It seems to me that these efforts to return us to the 'family' are desperate measures to make sure that control stays where they want it and what better way to keep control than to change the law and fiddle about with the way that people dependent upon the state receive income.

Changes to benefits for lone parents mean that One Parent Benefit, which is traditionally paid with child benefit in recognition that it might just cost a bit more to bring up kids alone, has been phased out and will not be paid to new claimants from next year. Not only that but the lone parent premiums in housing benefit and income support which add a little extra to these benefits for lone parents, are also being phased out. The idea is that the only added cost in bringing up children alone is that of childcare whilst the parent is out at work and this can be claimed back in Family Credit. Better get married/stay married then, at least we'll be better off.

Still, the family is changing whether the chums at Westminster like it or not. They may flail about and foam at the mouth about the sanctity and sanity of two adults and two-point- however-many children, with the idea that only

children brought up in this scenario can thrive. But people are choosing to live differently now, bringing up kids in one parent families, in extended families, in tribes on the road and up in the trees. The evidence shows that children in these families are just like others, the fact is that children from two parent families can be fucked up and children from one parent families can be fucked up but it is family relationships, sometimes poverty, helplessness and lack of choices which fuck up lives, not the number of parents bringing up the kids.

Unfortunately, the reality is the more that people depend upon the welfare state, the more they are vulnerable to state control and the

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less likely they are to be free to live a life of their own choice in families which reflect their own needs and desires. Anarchists need to critically examine the welfare state which exerts so much control over us from our early days until we die. What choices does anyone have to live differently when they are always at the mercy of changes to the way that they receive income, and are dependent upon the increasingly run down state system of health care? Wealthy people can choose their own options for financial and physical well-being but as you move down the socio-economic ladder the options become increasingly limited. But it is here that the need is greatest.

For many people the idea

of being independent of the state is inconceivable but strategies for freeing people are already in action throughout the country. LETS schemes help people to exchange skills to avoid payment for work done and Credit Unions help people to borrow money rather than succumbing to loan sharks and finance houses charging sky high interest rates. There are other options too, community food co-ops and shared childminding, housing and transport.

Sadly the majority of these schemes are still the privilege of those who can conceive of self help and freedom from the state and these people are most often from the middle classes. What of the women in the council houses

then bringing up their kids on their own, what of the men out of work at 40 with little hope of another job, the 26 years olds who might never work? These are the very people who are the targets of state control and

who remain at the mercy of changes to the benefit system. Who will help these people to fight back, to make the efforts required to first of all rise above the apathy and then begin to believe that it can be different even >p4

**Workers
of the world:**



Relax!

anarchism, direct action and utopia

"The essential element in utopia is not hope, but desire." Ruth Levitas

A CENTRAL TENET of anarchism is that ends and means are inseparable; in seeking social change anarchists have always been adamant that a non-authoritarian society can emerge only through non-authoritarian practice, rejecting the intermediate State structures and temporary dictatorships that have disfigured Marxist socialism. Rather, as John Clark has pointed out

*The distinctive characteristic of anarchist programs is that they institute an immediate movement in the direction of voluntarism and antiauthoritarianism.**

These programs reject representation - with its inevitable pragmatic concessions, endemic corruption, debilitating remoteness - in favour of direct action, aimed at actively seeking to take control of circumstance. In reality, since the anarchist ideal is a society that is both voluntaristic and non-authoritarian, this direct action is an attempt to create this ideal - the anarchist utopia - in the present. Anarchists are not content to wait until 'after the revolution' or until the ballot papers have been counted to put their idea(s) into practice.

At a basic level, direct action is any attempt to attain a goal without recourse to petitioning those in authority, or seeking an outcome indirectly - hence it does not include voting or demonstrations, but does encompass anti-road protests, strikes and occupations. This represents, though, only a very limited view of direct action, a form driven by an end. In many cases direct action is seen as merely a tactic, the most likely strategy to succeed under particular circumstances, and a more

fundamental aspect - the liberatory potential of acting without mediation - is forgotten.

Direct action is not simply an unstructured dynamism, or a call to action at all costs; it is a rejection of the structures of control and a determination to autonomy in all aspects of social existence - a struggle for utopia.

Direct action, in short, is not a 'tactic' that can be adopted or discarded in terms of its 'ef-



*fectiveness' or 'popularity'; it is a moral principle, an ideal, indeed, a sensibility. It should imbue every aspect of our lives and behaviour and outlook.***

Direct action becomes therefore the underlying principle of anarchism, and the necessity of maintaining the utopian vision as an essential element of anarchism becomes clear; it is only through the attempt to create utopia that direct action moves beyond a narrow dynamism to become the nucleus of a libertarian practice.

It is true that Utopianism is often denigrated, seen as either a motivation toward unrealistic goals or as the insistence on applying a rigid blue-print of a perfect society. While there is an element of truth in these criticisms - a truth always suggested in the risk of change - they are neither necessary nor inevitable. Instead,

utopianism can offer a different truth.

Realism too often becomes an acceptance of the status quo - what is real is what is offered to us now, a pitiful substitute for a genuine humanity and realistic ecology. Hence anarchists have sought to "Demand the Impossible!", to move beyond the contours of drab convention and stifling routine. It may not even be that such utopias offer an immediately attainable reality - their function is to offer a playground for our desires, to allow us to move beyond the narrow confines of the present and ponder the infinite possibilities of the future. If we do not allow our imaginations free play we risk becoming trapped in the conceptualizations and categorizations of hierarchical, repressive and repressed society.

Neither is it true that utopia demands a rigid blue-print to be adhered to - instead it offers suggestions, possibilities that may or may not be reached; and if they are reached they become staging points for the journey to the next utopia; as Oscar Wilde put it, "Progress is the realization of Utopia".

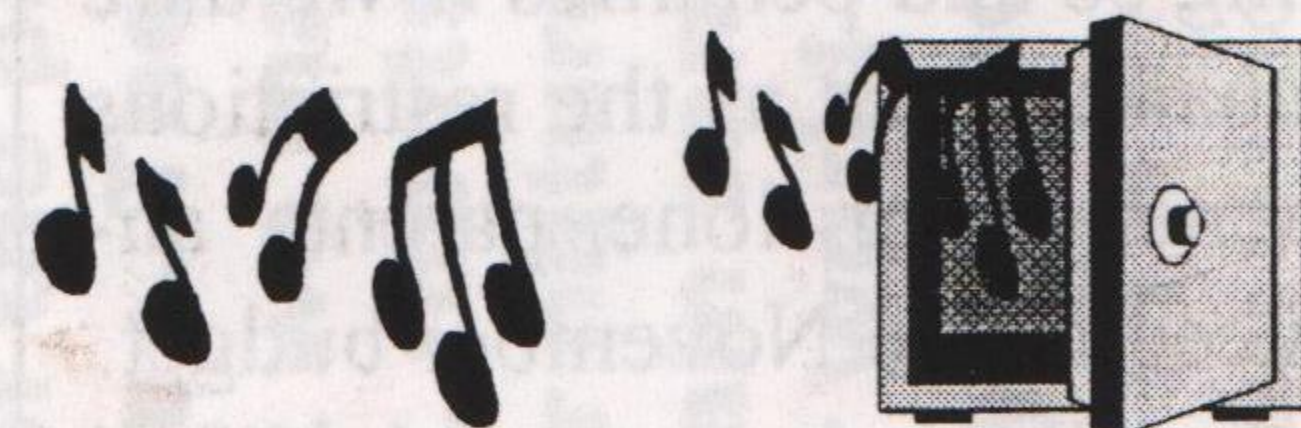
It is worth remembering, though, that utopia is not only the concern of the radical imagination - the 'futurologists', in reality apologists for the present, routinely offer new visions of a (technocratic and capitalist) future, where the super-consumer will be able to shop in ever greater comfort in the sanitized and surveilled mega-markets of the twenty-first century. If there is a lesson in this it is that we cannot allow our utopias to be constructed on the basis of consumerism and complex technologies, un- >p4

(<p5)because they pose not one iota of threat the establishment.

On the other hand, a friend of mine who'd seen the film in Sheffield told me how the audience clapped and cheered at the end of the show. Perhaps, just perhaps, this film did in some way serve as something more than entertainment. Perhaps, in the areas hardest hit by the pit closures and the strikes, the film said "what you were fighting for was right. As communities, as people, it did matter and continues to matter". It may be that this portrayal of a piece of living history may help to restore the faith in people battered by forces outside of their control and give them the strength to keep fighting. I'm not convinced, but I am hopeful. FN

(<p5)Well, 'A' might be for 'Anarchy', but C is for 'Commodity'. I think Chumbas have done a valuable service promoting anarcho. ideas down the years, and we all have to make a living (sad, but true), but do I detect a hint that perhaps they've been around a bit too long? Icons of the assorted anti-fascist/anti-CJA/anti-anti milieu they may be, but I can't help thinking of what 'Dolf' says (in the book):

"I like being independent. I can't imagine working for the music industry. I might as well become a pimp." SM



defiance at the barricades and the barricades of defiance:

the greek farmers revolt of november\december 1996

"CONTROLLING THE ROAD does make you feel very powerful [...] many of us here believe that the only power you have in life is to vote and in our case has got us nowhere [...] We started this blockade because the government's budget is criminal. It wants to extinguish us farmers in the name of Maastricht" (The Guardian, 7/12/1996). Giorgos Pinatsis, one of the farmers who manned the barricade at a highway outside the town of Corinth, has chosen these words to describe what effectively was the biggest revolt that Greece has seen for decades. For almost thirty days the country was paralysed. Using their tractors and other farming equipment, the farmers raised barricades on more than a hundred rail links, highways and main roads. With the exemption of military vehicles and ambulances, commercial and private transportation came effectively to a standstill.

The spark of this revolt was the "socialist" (PASOK) government's austerity budget. Its main aim is to lower the Greek state's budget deficit in order to meet the Maastricht treaty's criteria for a single currency, "at any cost": the price will be paid not by the economic elite, the potential beneficiaries from Greece joining the single currency, but rather the people "down there", the small farmers, the workers, the "shop-floor" and their families. Thus, when the "socialists" broke their pre-election promise to reschedule the farmers debts and take a minimum of measures to support the Greek agricultural sector (lower taxes on fertilizers and farming equipment) the farmers had enough and took, literally, the streets.

To understand the causes of revolt one has to examine what happened in the Greek agricultural

sector after Greece's entry in the European Community in 1980. Before the entry Greece was almost self-sufficient in agricultural products and there was a surplus in the agricultural balance (exports minus imports of food, spirits and tobacco). However, the negative influence of EC subsidies (only for very few products) and production quotas destroyed self-sufficiency and altered the very structure of agricultural production. Greek farmers produce fewer products for artificially high prices. After the withdraw of subsidies the prices will fall dramatically. Further, due to the "opening up" of the Greek market to the agricultural products of the European agribusinesses, the surplus in the agricultural balance has turned into a deficit (983 million \$ in 1991-94) (1).

Being consequences of the European and domestic neo-liberal plans to make the Greek agricultural sector more "efficient" (that is to move from a small-farmers to an agribusiness controlled agricultural production), these developments will have devastating social (e.g. unemployment) and ecological (e.g. intensive farming, low quality food) effects. In this context, the farmers revolt was a fight not only for their own livelihood but for social justice and the quality of life of the whole of Greek society. Yet another important dimension of the revolt was that it exposed the disillusionment with the politics of the politicians and trade unionists. The organisation of farmers was in regional "Committees of Struggle" with their representatives being directly elected by and accountable to the people of the farming communities.

The majority of attempts by the unionists sent by the government at the barricades to >p4