

Freedom

Freedom is not possible in isolation, to be attained by a few individuals in a vast sea of alienation, coercion, domination and unfreedom. Anarchists want freedom for all. The emancipation of one man necessitates the emancipation of all men. It must be the conscious aim of the mass of society. Each person, however, will have to achieve his or her own mental revolution first. This will, in my view, be partly achieved by example and demonstration (by Provos, Diggers, anarchists and, no doubt, by others yet to come); but it will probably be achieved largely through propaganda and education, followed by democratic (in the real sense of the word) and non-authoritarian organisation. It cannot be brought about 'for the masses' by a 'politically conscious' minority or élite as has been claimed by communists and the like. The history of China and Russia has more than demonstrated that. A free society cannot be established by political parties or leaders, however sincere. And the suggestion that the emancipation of the working-class will be brought about by the masses getting control (through a political party of course!) of the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, and converting these into an agent of freedom (as is advocated by one political group) is ludicrous in the extreme. If we really want freedom then we must do the job ourselves. *We shall have to struggle continuously in every way possible against all the unfreedom of present-day society.* We must work for a new society and way of life without war or the threat of war hanging over our heads like the Sword of Damocles; we must aim for a world without want, economic insecurity and deprivation, and without bureaucracies, governments and states.

Anarchists do not want a Utopia or a perfect society. That would be impossible anyway. Nor do we intend to plan or 'organise' society in advance. We leave that to the politicians and professional manipulators. People, once liberated from the trammels of domination and exploitation, will organise their society—quite freely—for themselves.

Freedom, therefore, does not consist in dreams of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of them, and the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. Freedom consists in organised control over external nature and ourselves. It necessitates, not imposed discipline, not external authority, but internal authority and confidence in oneself. Real freedom can only mean the attainment of both the collective and individual well-being, the fullest functioning, of each individual in relation to every other individual. It can only mean the freedom of men collectively, living together as harmoniously as is humanly possible. For man can never be a law unto himself: that would be the negation of freedom.

Freedom, then, implies the elimination of all forms of alienation, domination and exploitation of man by man. It can only mean the protection of the whole of society against the rapacity of special, dominating interests. Put quite simply, as Alexander Berkman observed in his *ABC of Anarchism*, freedom '... means that you should be free; that no one should enslave you, boss you, rob you or impose upon you. It means you should be free to do the things you want to do; and that you should not be compelled to do what you don't want to do. It means that you should have a chance to choose the kind of life you want to live, and live it without anybody interfering. It means that the next fellow should have the same freedom as you, that every one should have the same rights and liberties. It means that all men are brothers, and that they should live like brothers, in peace and harmony.' That would be freedom.

The choice is ours. And only we can make it.

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Freedom - why not?

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And what shall it be, as I told thee before, save that men shall be determined to be free; yea free as thou wouldst have them, when thine hopes rise the highest, and thou art not thinking of the king's uncles, and poll-groat bailiffs, and the villeinage of Essex, but the end of all, when men shall have the fruits of the earth of their toil thereon, without money and without price. . . . ('The Dream of John Ball' by William Morris.)

Things cannot go well in England, nor ever will, until everything shall be in common. . . . (John Ball, 1381.)

What kind of society do we live in today? Is it 'for the best in the best of all possible worlds'? Does it function in the interests of the vast majority of the people? Is it a 'free' society? Indeed, what is it called? And what is it really like? These are a few of the questions I shall attempt—very briefly—to answer in this short pamphlet.

Generally, the system of society in which we live is called capitalism. This is not a dirty word or term of abuse, although it has been used as such by communists and others. Capitalism is world-wide; it embraces every country. Briefly, it is a social system wherein the means and factors of wealth production and distribution (i.e. the land, factories, transportation, etc.) take the form of capital, and are owned privately by individuals or the state to the exclusion of the majority of the population. And capital is nothing more nor less than wealth used to create more wealth through the legal exploitation of large numbers of wage and salary earners, most of whom own little or nothing except their ability to work for an employer. In such a society as ours, almost everything is produced for exchange, for sale with a view to profit. In the main, things are not manufactured, and services not rendered, solely because people desire or need them. If, like millions of people throughout the world, you have insufficient money to buy, say, food or fuel, you will almost certainly have to go without. Even in advanced capitalist countries like Britain or the United States, millions of people suffer from want and deprivation; some are, of course, extremely wealthy and others not actually living in abject poverty usually find it difficult to 'make ends meet' most of the time. The majority of us in Britain come within this category. At the same time, however, many of our so-called needs are artificially created by advertising. I shall return to this later.

Modern capitalism is in many ways very different from the *laissez-faire*, every-man-for-himself capitalism of the last century. Many small businessmen and shopkeepers have been crushed or bought-out by vast trusts and combines. Competition has largely given way to pre-arranged varieties of the same. In very many countries the state has now become the largest and most powerful employer. As workers and consumers we have very little choice. This, indeed, is the much-vaunted freedom that we are continually called upon to preserve and defend!

In the second half of the twentieth century man has reached a remarkable degree of mastery over nature, and yet he is not in control of the very forces he has created.

Alienated

The increasing concentration of ownership and control has tended to restrict individual initiative and responsibility. It has weakened the 'self' and has stifled individuality and creativity. For the rationality of the system in its technical aspects is accompanied by increasing irrationality and irresponsibility in its social aspects. I need not detail the terrible waste, destruction, slaughter and misery brought about by the last two world wars, or the bestialities of the conflict in Vietnam, or the physical and mental suffering caused by racial prejudice and discrimination. War and racism are only two, albeit extreme, manifestations of increasing irrationality in the world today. Another is alienation.

Originally, alienation meant insanity. Nowadays, it means estrangement or loss. It is, however, a useful word to describe certain aspects of what I—and many others—consider is a sick society.

Today, then, man has become alienated and estranged from his means of livelihood, from the very things he has produced and from his fellow-man; indeed, even from himself. He has become self-estranged. Alienation in production has led to individual powerlessness and a general feeling of isolation and frustration. In most firms the worker has become a mere cog in a vast impersonal machine. Alienation is almost complete, almost total, whether we live in the so-called private enterprise capitalism of the West or the spurious 'socialism' or 'communism' (i.e. state-capitalism) of the East. And it makes precious little difference to you or I whether we live in a 'democratic' country like, say,

Britain or Holland, or a 'totalitarian' one like Poland or Yugoslavia. This alienation and domination naturally weighs most heavily on the workers. They have for the most part become economic atoms, dancing to the tune of atomistic managements and governments.

Capitalism has completely changed man's attitude to work. It has destroyed craftsmanship and a joy in work. The last thing that most of us want to do is to get up in the morning and go to 'work'! Of course, what we really mean is not work at all: it is employment. Generally, our jobs are repetitive, uninteresting and, from our point of view, purposeless. We have little or no control over what we do or what we produce. The division of labour is now so extreme that none of us ever makes a complete article. In fact, in many cases, factory workers often never see the finished product. I am not, however, suggesting a return to the hand-loom or potter's wheel; but I do say that our work should be as varied as possible, that it should be worth doing, that it should be done in the very best possible conditions, and that it should be controlled and determined by the producers (i.e. society) themselves. Under such conditions it would lose its stigma.

Bureaucracy

An important aspect of modern society is bureaucratisation. Capitalism is becoming more and more bureaucratic every day. This applies to both state and non-state institutions. Indeed, the state has become increasingly powerful in all countries. Here in Britain, for example, the state, national and local, accounts for over 40% of the Gross National Product and employs more than 25% of the country's labour force. Although it appears to be less overtly coercive and repressive, it in fact pervades our lives to a far greater degree than ever before. Its tentacles spread far and wide. Moreover, successive governments, both Tory and Labour, have given greater and greater power to the police, thus curtailing individual freedom.

Modern society is largely organised by bureaucrats. And bureaucrats are, or at least are supposed to be, specialists in the administration of things *and men*. The bureaucrat's relationship to people is one of complete, or almost complete, alienation. It is entirely—or, again, almost entirely—impersonal. This is not due to some inherent wickedness of the bureaucrat (although he is often an authoritarian type), but is a symptom of a sick society.

Bureaucratisation affects almost all organisation. Political parties, many Trade Unions, even Friendly Societies and motoring organisations are run by 'professional' manipulators and specialists. There is very little democracy as the word is generally understood in any of them today. And the last thing that the bureaucrats and manipulators want is for the mass of the people to run their own affairs *in their own interest*. That would be anarchy!

Conditioned

Alienation also permeates social and individual consumption. For in our society, unlike all former ones, we acquire almost everything we possess through the medium of money. We are, of course, so conditioned that we take this for granted. But actually this is a most curious way of acquiring the things we want. If a person has sufficient money he can purchase anything he wants—whether he has worked for that money or not. Not only that, but quite often (particularly if we are so-called middle-class) we acquire things in order to just have them, because it is 'the thing' statuswise. We are continuously being conditioned through advertising into *wanting* a new car, TV set, washing machine or suite of furniture every couple of years or so, not because the new is better than what we already have (it usually isn't!) but because we are pressurised thus. Moreover, we mortgage our wages and salaries up to the hilt through hire purchase agreements just to get them. Truly, we have become slaves of the admen.

Today, then, we consume as we produce, without any concrete

relatedness to the objects with which we deal. All this results in a situation where we are never really satisfied, never really happy or contented. This, naturally, pleases the manufacturers. Indeed, they encourage it. It sustains and increases their profits. Our craving for consumption has lost all connection with our real needs. For consumption has become not a means to greater individual and social happiness, but an end in itself. It has become merely compulsive. This, moreover, has affected our whole lives, our whole existence, our whole being. It has increased our passivity. Many of us still have hobbies and interests, but to a large extent, compared with the past, we have become 'watchers' and 'listeners' rather than 'doers'. We leave the doing to professionals.

Again, community life and a feeling of comradeship—a feeling of 'belonging'—particularly in cities, has declined. The centres of many of our large cities such as London or Glasgow are completely dead (except for a few theatre areas and 'red light' districts) after 7 p.m. And such suburban dormitories as Ilford or Orpington are hardly less so. Of our present dilemma, E. A. Gutkind suggests that 'Life is not a shuttle-service between the sleeping-berth in a suburban desert and the work-place in a factory or office. The resignation with which innumerable people tolerate that their life is reduced to this miserable dullness and drudgery is pathetic—but excusable. Our civilisation has not understood how to free the creative impulses and the imaginative spontaneity in the common run of men. It has let them become stunted. It has cultivated more than anything else a superficial familiarity with things, and the lop-sided knowledge of experts. Our most cherished ambition is to save time. But we have no clear idea what to do with it when we have saved it. The docile acceptance of the shuttle-service between home and work as the dominating factor of life is another form of escapism avoiding the responsibility to think for ourselves, and to experience ever anew what life in the fullness of spiritual re-creation and in unending stream of transformation and manifoldness can be. The conservatism of humanity is its curse.' (*The Expanding Environment*. Freedom Press.)

Liberation

Unfortunately, however, most people are hardly aware of the prevailing alienation, domination and *unfreedom* of modern capitalist society. They do not really know what is going on in the world around them. They do not seem to realise that they are no longer *real* people but mere numbers or signatures on an ever-increasing pile of forms in an ever-increasing stack of files. Today, it is almost impossible to do *anything* without licences, permits or signatures on little bits of paper (in triplicate, of course!), entailing endless wearing down by waiting in anonymous rooms, or for answers to letters only to be passed on to someone else. But liberation from the present state of affairs is, in my view, still possible if we really want it and are prepared to struggle for it. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has not yet arrived—quite. Freedom and responsibility, a free society, is still within our grasp.

We anarchists do not put our trust in politicians, in political parties, in leaders or anyone else for that matter. We trust only ourselves. I have no intention here of listing the promises made by political leaders and aspiring leaders. Memories are short, but most readers will agree that promises are made to be broken anyway. Politicians aspire for power over us, and the plums of office. They are not in the game for our benefit, whatever they might say. I am not suggesting that the Tories are worse than the Labourites, or that the Liberals (or the Communists) are worse than the others. They are all very much the same. When in power they all run the system (or let it run them) in very much the same way. All parties have increased the power of the state; indeed, both the Labour and Communist parties have as their avowed aim the state ownership and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange. This is the complete negation of freedom, of a free and classless society.

How, then, can we achieve a free society? In fact, what kind of society do anarchists and libertarian socialists want? Not all

anarchists are in complete agreement on either of these questions. I shall, therefore, only mention my own views and attitude towards a free or freer society and the way, or ways, that I think it may be brought about. My views generally coincide with those of many other anarchists whom I know in East Anglia. Although an optimist, I am far from certain that I shall ever see the kind of society that I want.

As I have already indicated most people accept, with perhaps a few reservations, the world as it is. But for some time now there has been a certain ferment, particularly among many younger people. About ten years ago, opposition to 'The Bomb' began to develop. First, we had the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament whose aims were extremely limited; then the Committee of 100, whose aims were somewhat wider. Both these organisations tended to grapple with effects rather than causes—and both were infiltrated by political pressure groups. Fortunately, however, some of their members and supporters began to question not only the manufacture and use of thermonuclear weapons, not just the war in Vietnam, but war itself, the causes of war, and the complete futility and inhumanity of our whole system. Some of them became anarchists and libertarian socialists; no doubt others will do likewise. I hope so.

Flower Power ?

The last two or three years have seen the emergence of a number of new 'movements', all rejecting in varying degrees the norms and 'values' of the Establishment.

Early in 1965 a Dutch group began publishing a journal called *Provo*. Amsterdam youth, bored and fed-up with the conventions of bourgeois society, began to be attracted to Provo ideas in increasing numbers. Smoke bombs thrown into the Parliament building, harassment of, and attacks on, the police, together with such 'creative' vandalism as the painting of public buildings that had been left undecorated for years, were all aspects of Provo activity. In their war on traffic chaos the Amsterdam Provos provided, quite freely, white bicycles for anyone wanting transportation within the city. Indeed, spontaneous activity to mock established institutions has been a Provo way of life. When forced to face the power of the bureaucracy, Provos use the bureaucracy's own red tape to ensnarl it, causing complete confusion. They literally carry out every order to absurd lengths; they demand that all rules and regulations be applied that can be applied, and they exhaust all possible appeals. When faced with the military call-up board's rule that the board be kept informed of changes of address and conditions, Provos send daily post-cards and long letters to the authorities providing minute details. A significant number of such people soon tie bureaucracy in knots!

Largely without leaders, the Provos have become world-famous (or notorious) and their movement has spread to America and elsewhere. Unfortunately, however, without any positive anarchist or libertarian alternative to offer in place of the very society that they abhor, their movement will probably wither and die—if it has not already begun to do so.

Far more bizarre is the Hippy or Flower Power Movement. This appears to have originated in San Francisco with the Pretty People. Its adherents are noted for their colourful clothes, long hair, flowers, bells, and to some extent the taking of soft drugs. It is largely a revival of the Aesthetic Movement of the nineteenth century, its greatest exponent being Oscar Wilde. Hippy gatherings have a distinctive pre-Raphaelite flavour. The Hippies and Flower Power People are in gentle—very gentle!—revolt against the ugly conformism of modern capitalist society and the estrangement of the individual. They are, however, almost entirely a consumer group: they are not particularly interested in the means of production and who control them. They are not concerned with theories of the class war, or with radical change, but with that rather uncertain quantity, 'love'. With the Beatles they claim that 'All You Need Is Love'. They have borrowed, together with the Young Liberals, that admirable anarchist slogan 'Make Love, Not War' without, unfortunately, really

understanding its implications. According to a BBC TV report by John Morgan, 'They withdraw from protest against Vietnam; they set their face against any role in the Civil Rights movement.' And of them, Manfred Mann says: 'These people are as harmless as they seem, and represent a very gentle rejection of society.'

Diggers

Of somewhat tougher calibre are the Diggers. They are also more practical. They have much to teach 'theoretical' anarchists and so-called scientific socialists; and something to learn as well. The Diggers take their name from a utopian Christian communist movement that emerged in seventeenth-century England during the Revolution against the Stuart monarchy. Their leader, the 'True Leveller' Gerrald Winstanley, argued that 'When mankind began to buy and sell, then he did fall from his innocence; for then he began to oppress and cozen one another of their creation birthright.' Moreover, 'This buying and selling did bring in, and still does bring in, discontent and wars which have plagued mankind sufficiently for so doing. And the nations of the world will never learn to beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks, and leave off warring, until this cheating device of buying and selling be cast out among the rubbish of kingly powers.' (Quoted from *Cromwell and Communism*, by Eduard Bernstein.) Winstanley called for a society, 'a commonwealth', where '. . . there shall be no buying and selling. . . . If any man or family want grain or other provisions, they may go to the storehouse and fetch without money.' All land would be held in common, and all 'officers' of the commonwealth would be elected annually.

The new Diggers, although influenced by the ideas of Winstanley, are an outgrowth of the American Hippy Movement. They reject the market economy and denigrate the money system. They give away all useful wealth that they can beg, borrow or steal. They provide free distribution of food to poor kids and the destitute—and with no strings attached. They attempt, where possible, to provide free lodging, and distribute free clothing from their storehouses. In the words of *The Western Socialist* (Boston): 'The Diggers, unlike the "do-gooder" groups, do not offer "alms" to the "deserving" (and to the "undeserving"). They make a point of saying that wherever there is a human need and the means to provide this need, the needy have a right to the wealth. They even go further and indicate that all society must be organised on a basis of the satisfaction of human need without buying and selling. Symbolising their rejection of a money society, they have publicly burnt money and given it a mock funeral. In other ways too, they challenge accepted theories. They make clear that they oppose the implications of "leadership." They insist that they have no leaders, that their actions are based upon an understanding and that leadership is unnecessary where there exists an understanding. On the question of war there also seems to be a realisation that mere demonstrations will not succeed in ending it. As long as a war-producing society exists there will be wars, many contend. They have no brief for the political state; they feel that men should work at tasks that give satisfaction and should not be compelled, in order to survive, to work at meaningless tasks. Finally, they believe that the world, along with everything that is in and on it, should belong to those who inhabit it.'

Of all the groups that have recently emerged the Diggers are, from the libertarian point of view, the most refreshing. Even so, they also have their weaknesses and limitations. Their activities are largely 'experimental', rather like the many utopian communities that have come and gone over the years. They are very much a minority; and, as such, have been harassed by the police. Moreover, they have tended to underestimate the powers of the state. But unlike so many 'professional' revolutionaries of the traditional Left, they do attempt to achieve something here and now. They are pointing the way to freedom. And *that* at least is something.