

LECTURE 11

THE ANARCHIST TRADITION

["If I can't dance, it's not my Revolution", (*Circa 1920*)
Emma Goldman, 1869-1940. Lithuania/Haymarket/Homestead/Alexander Berkman and Henry Frick]

["Under the pavement, the beach!" (Paris, 1968)]

["The bricks we throw at the police today will build the schools of tomorrow! (2009)]

["When life sucks, Ask for more" (Diesel, 2009)]

[;Que Se Vayan Todos!] All of them must go! (Argentina 2001-2002)

The anarchist tradition is a central component of the 'libertarian' tradition. These traditions have very deep and complicated roots in the struggle waged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe and North America against privilege and inequality, and in the development of conceptions of human freedom in which 'men' are seen as inherently equal, and consequently, are understood to be ends in themselves. Men are ends in themselves. They are not instruments to be used or misused by others – they cannot be ranked by birth or by regal or aristocratic privilege.

[Each man is a universe unto himself – individualism/equality/liberty.]

These ideas in extremely bitter and prolonged struggles have during the course of the development of capitalist society been extended to women, to black people, in fact, to all human beings.

[WOMEN'S FRANCHISE (BRITAIN) 1928]
[DESEGREGATION (USA) 1964]

These ideas of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' – "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal" – have been central to the development of bourgeois or capitalist society in France, Britain, and North America, and by extension, to all of the countries with prosperous and successful capitalist economies.

Consequently, many defenders of capitalism see libertarian ideas of one sort or another as absolutely integral to capitalist development. This is so much the case that over the last thirty years or so 'libertarianism' has become an influential mode of thinking on what might be thought of *in more traditional terms* as 'the right'. These 'right-wing' or 'bourgeois' or 'pro-capitalist' libertarians believe in the importance of ensuring that the role of the state is limited to the protection and safety of the country, of the individual and of their private property. Consequently, they are critical of

progressive taxation, of welfare payments, critical of all restrictions upon the rights of individuals to take drugs, bear arms, and a host of other limitations of personal freedom which they regards as intrusions upon personal liberty.

The prior commitment of pro-capitalist libertarians is to reducing the state to the smallest possible size, leaving all regulation of economic affairs in the hands of the market, and all education and welfare provision in the hands of the private sector, of charities and private benevolence. Consequently, they want to dismantle state subsidies to industry and agriculture, they want to dismantle state funded education, health and welfare programmes – and the systems of taxation and duties that go with them.

From this it is clear that pro-capitalist libertarians *must not be confused* with Conservatives or Republicans, or with the so-called ‘neo-cons’ or with ‘neo-liberals’. While there are many points of contact between the outlook of libertarians and the policies of conservatives in the prosperous capitalist countries it is evident that no conservative politician is ever likely to advance a political programme informed by anything approaching a fully libertarian position.

Pro-capitalist libertarians do not for example believe that principles of equality should ever be allowed to take precedence over liberty or the right of the individual to dispose of their incomes and property in the manner in which they choose. They do not believe that equality or justice should be confused with more popular ideas of ‘fairness’. Consequently, they do not believe in *progressive taxation* – they think that everybody should pay the same rate of tax, the same percentage of their income, irrespective of how rich or poor they are. This, they would argue is equality. Taxation systems where the rich pay a higher percentage of their income are, according to libertarians, unequal and consequently represent an erosion of personal liberty.

This kind of libertarianism has arisen in response to the ideas set out by John Rawls in his book *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. Rawls promotes the idea that freedom should always be balanced with equality – that nothing should be done to promote freedom which undermines equality. This means that you should evaluate any policy by how it will affect the worst off in society.

[Social Solidarity]

[David Cameron – and the Tory Shadow Cabinet – constant repetition of concern for the needy and disadvantaged]

The most important libertarian challenge to Rawls’s theory of justice was set out by Robert Nozick in his book, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, in 1974. In this book Nozick with great care and precision explains the modern pro-capitalist libertarian position. He explains his purpose in the following manner:

“Our main conclusions about the state are that a minimal state, limited to the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, fraud, enforcement of

contracts, and so on, is justified; that any more extensive state will violate persons' rights not to be forced to do certain things, and is unjustified; and that the minimal state is inspiring as well as right. Two noteworthy implications are that the state may not use its coercive apparatus for the purpose of getting some citizens to aid others, or in order to prohibit activities to people for their *own* good and protection."¹

Nozick, of course, goes on to deal with (and reject) the apparent callousness of his theory towards the poor and disadvantaged.

However, what is most clear about this form of libertarianism is its absolute belief in the defence of private property. You will note that the principle role of the 'minimal state' in Nozick's scheme is the protection of contracts and of the property of individuals from fraud, compulsory welfare or social insurance payments, and theft.

This brings us to the fundamental difference between this right-wing libertarianism and the wholly anti-capitalist libertarianism associated with anarchism. In the anarchist tradition the protection of the private property of the capitalists and the well to do is an anathema. Indeed one of the most famous slogan's of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) was 'Property is theft!'

"If I were asked to answer the following question: WHAT IS SLAVERY? and I should answer in one word, IT IS MURDER, my meaning would be understood at once. No extended argument would be required to show that the power to take from a man his thought, his will, his personality, is a power of life and death; and that to enslave a man is to kill him. Why, then, to this other question: WHAT IS PROPERTY! may I not likewise answer, IT IS ROBBERY, without the certainty of being misunderstood; the second proposition being no other than a transformation of the first?"²

[What kind of property is "theft"? Capital, i.e. property used to employ waged labour]

This position has set the standard for any serious anarchist ever since. Although Max Stirner (1806-1856) [*The Ego and Its Own*] was more cautious, fearing that communist confiscation of property might result in new forms of authoritarian rule (a position echoed even by Bakunin), most anarchists have assumed that the abolition of private property and the institution of socialist and co-operative forms of social property was integral to the anarchist revolutionary project.

The reason for this is that most anarchists share with most Marxists the idea that workers are oppressed and exploited by the capitalists' control of private property. As Michael Bakunin (1814-1876) explained:

¹ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 1974, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p.ix.

² P. J. Proudhon, *What Is Property? An Inquiry Into The Principle Of Right And Of Government*, 1840, Project Gutenberg: Champaign IL, <http://dhn.best.vwh.net/archives/proudhon-ch1.html>, Chapter 1.

“It is necessary to repeat here the irrefutable arguments of Socialism which no bourgeois economist has yet succeeded in disproving? What is property, what is capital in their present form? For the capitalist and the property owner they mean the power and the right, guaranteed by the State, to live without working. And since neither property nor capital produces anything when not fertilized by labor – that means the power and the right to live by exploiting the work of someone else, the right to exploit the work of those who possess neither property nor capital and who thus are forced to sell their productive power to the lucky owners?”³

So, in a number of limited senses, Bakunin, agreed with Karl Marx, whom he described as “the illustrious leader of German Communism” and with Marx’s *Das Kapital*, which he not only translated into Russian but also described as a “magnificent work”.⁴

[This is Volume 1 of *Capital* published by Marx in 1867]

For both Bakunin and Marx workers were exploited by capitalists and the only way out of this system was for the workers to take over the means of production and to establish ways of carrying out production and running industry in what Bakunin emphasised as a harmonious, voluntary and collective spirit.

Anarchists agree with Marxists and with Communists that exploitation must be swept away and that private property must be abolished.

However, it is in their attitude towards the state that anarchists have differed with most Communists. This is because most socialists and most communists have believed either in using the existing state to carry out reforms or in building an entirely new *workers’ state*.

The anarchists always believed that any attempt to use or establish the repressive institutions of the state would result in the defeat of socialism. Anarchists have always believed that ‘red bureaucracy’ would be just as repressive and repulsive as any existing kind of state. This dispute came to a head in the 1870s following the defeat of the Paris Commune.

[The Paris Commune July 1870-May 1871]

[*The Civil War in France*, March-May 1871]⁵

Following the disaster of the Commune the Marxists and many other socialists in the International were beginning to focus upon intervening in republican and parliamentary politics, in particular with the establishment of the German Empire

³ Michael Bakunin, *The Capitalist System*, 1870-71, Anarchy Archives, Pitzer College, Claremont CA, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bakunin/capstate.html, accessed 13 June 2005.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, 1871, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/> accessed 24/01/06.

[Bismarck] and the extension of the franchise in Britain [1867]. It was this development, which led to the fundamental split between the anarchists on the one hand and most of the socialists and communists on the other hand. One side was set against using or building up the state and the other side was not only prepared to work within the existing state forms but was conceiving of building up new forms of workers' states. In *Statism and Anarchy*, written by Bakunin in 1873, Bakunin predicts that 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' will become the dictatorship over the proletariat and that the new socialist rulers, or 'red bureaucracy' would become a new governing elite set above the rest of the working class.⁶

Consequently, after 1872 the First International was plunged into a crisis from which it never recovered, the General Council was moved to New York. Four years later, in 1876, it dissolved. And this dispute between anarchism on the one hand and most socialists and communists on the other has continued to define the nature of anarchism as a political outlook in which opposition to both private property and exploitation is associated with an insistence that *any* form of state will inevitably unravel the social harmony and collectivism for which all anarchists, socialists and communists are supposed to be fighting.

So, this is more than a 'family quarrel' it is a fundamental split in which anarchists believe that those who are committed to working with the state or to building up new state forms are inevitably destined to betray the 'ideals' for which they are supposed to be fighting.

Anarchists believe in the voluntary self-government of individuals and in obedience only to the collective decisions of those whom one chooses to work with. Any other form of government is an anathema. Proudhon makes this point brilliantly:

"To be GOVERNED is to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so. To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction noted, registered, counted, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, prevented, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, harassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, derided, outraged, dishonoured. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality."⁷

⁶ Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 1873, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, *passim*.

⁷ P. J. Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, 1851, London: Freedom Press, 1923, pp.293-4.

[Autocracies, Repressive colonial powers, dictatorships]

This hatred of government radically divided the anarchists from most socialists and communists. Anarchists, of course, continued to stress their socialist credentials and to organise for what they regarded as socialism or communism.

[Peter Kropotkin Anarchist Communism – *Mutual Aid*].

However, care has to be taken with these designations because of course some anarchists like Bakunin rejected what they understood to be communism:

“In one of his four speeches at the Congress of the *League of Peace and Freedom* in Bern (1868), he said: "I am not a Communist because Communism unites all forces of society in the state and becomes absorbed in it; because it inevitably leads to the concentration of all property in the hands of the state, while I seek the abolition of the state--the complete elimination of the principle of authority and governmental guardianship, which under the pretence of making men moral and civilising them, has up to now always enslaved, oppressed, exploited and ruined them."⁸

In the opening decades of the twentieth century mounting mass struggles amongst workers gave rise to various forms of *syndicalism* in which workers directly organised in political trade unions sought to develop revolutionary organisations without going through organised political parties. On top of the communist anarchism of Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) or Errico Malatesta (1853-1932) anarcho-syndicalism began to grow in response to the development of very large mass movements within the working class in a number of countries. As Rudolf Rocker explained it:

“Anarcho-Syndicalists are of the opinion that political parties, even when they bear a socialist name, are not fitted to perform either of these two tasks. The mere fact that, even in those countries where political Socialism commanded powerful organisations and had millions of voters behind it, the workers had never been able to dispense with trade unions because legislation offered them no protection in their struggle for daily bread, testifies to this. It frequently happened that in just these sections of the country where the Socialist parties were strongest the wages of workers were lowest and the conditions of labour worst.”⁹

This seems to me a very contentious claim. In fact I doubt that it was ever true – but Rocker is not alone in arguing this – it is certainly what many syndicalists thought.

⁸ Rudolf Rocker, ‘Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes’, *Anarchosyndicalism*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1938. See also: http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/rocker/sp001495/rocker_as1.html.

⁹ Rudolf Rocker, ‘The Objectives of Anarchosyndicalism’, *Anarchosyndicalism*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1938. See also: http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/rocker/sp001495/rocker_as4.html

At the same time as the growth of syndicalism more generally throughout the labour movement in France, Spain, Italy, USA, and even in South Wales, the splits in Germany Social Democracy and in the Bolshevik Revolution provoked the emergence of other kinds of anti-state, anti-Bolshevik communism.

[1914-1919 Spartacists and the Mass Strike:

Rosa Luxemburg (1871- 15th January 1919)

Karl Liebknecht (1871- 15th January 1919)

[The bloody thread leading from the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht and German social democracy]

Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925)

Gustav Noske (1868-1946)

[Anton Pannekoek (1873-1960): Council Communism]

So, faced with Bolshevism, Stalinism, Maoism, and Trotskyism, anarchists have continued to explore the possibility of bringing an end to capitalism, and end to exploitation and to the domination of private property. Despite the catastrophe of the defeat of the Spanish Revolution in 1936-1937 and the loss of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, anarchists have continued to stress the entirely practical side of their thought and activity.

Although, by the nineteen sixties and seventies Anarchists, like Murray Bookchin, and Situationists, like Guy Debord, believed that the class struggle had been absorbed by (or co-opted by) capitalist society,¹⁰ anarchists have continued to explore ways of living and organising that offer practical alternatives to existing state structures and to the profit-driven priorities of commercial institutions. Because of this anarchists have continued to have an immense influence upon both the modern ecological movement and upon the modern anti-capitalist movement.¹¹ Although anarchism may be frequently be associated with what Murray Bookchin has denounced as “Anarcho-Individualism” or “Lifestyle Anarchism”, collectivist or more socially orientated modes of anarchism continue to range themselves against exploitation and private property; anarchists to this day continue to emphasise a commitment to co-operation and voluntary association.¹²

¹⁰ Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1971, p180; Marcel Van der Linden, ‘The Prehistory of *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*: Josef Weber and the Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947-1964)’ in *Institute of Social History, Cruquiusweg 31*, p.138; Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1967, Detroit: Black & Red, 1983.

¹¹ Marcel Van der Linden, ‘The Prehistory of *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*: Josef Weber and the Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947-1964)’ in *Institute of Social History, Cruquiusweg 31*, pp.127-145.

¹² Murray Bookchin, ‘Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism:

An Unbridgeable Chasm’, Pitzer College, Claremont CA,

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bookchin/soclife.html, accessed 24/01/06

Lecture 11: The Anarchist Tradition.

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[After recent events in Europe you should read the new revolutionary manifesto published in France, *The Coming Insurrection*. You can read it in English on the DOCUMENTS page at www.studiesinanti-capitalism.net.]