



Anarchism

*What is it? Is it practical or utopian?
Is government necessary?*

By

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THE MATCH!



PAMPHLET SERIES

NUMBER THREE

This essay first appeared in **THE MATCH!**, a monthly Anarchist journal, Vol. 4, Numbers 9, 10, and 11 (Sept., Oct., and Nov., 1973) under the title "Anarchism— The What and Why". It is published in this edition as part of a continuing series of pamphlets about Anarchism, the purpose of which is to present both historical and original material on this subject.

Additional copies of this pamphlet are available at 5 cents each, from **THE MATCH!**, Post Office Box 3488, Tucson, Arizona 85722 (USA).

What is Anarchism?

As defined by Anarchists themselves, it is "the philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary." An Anarchist named Emma Goldman wrote this definition about fifty years ago, but the idea of Anarchism—that human society would be better off not having governments—did not originate with Emma Goldman or, properly speaking, any other single person we are today aware of. There have been people of a more or less Anarchistic leaning in every era and place, although the actual word "anarchy", compounded out of Greek root-words meaning "without rule", was coined comparatively recently.

You say "more or less". Aren't all Anarchists in complete agreement?

No. Formerly all those who accepted the label of Anarchist to describe themselves were divided into two main categories: the individualists and the collectivists. While these groupings differed over matters pertaining to economics, organization, and general philosophical orientation, they found common cause in opposing *per se* the existence of government.

Today, these two broad divisions still exist, but another enters the picture as well. Referred to loosely by the term "libertarian", this third grouping or division holds weakly to the idea that certain forms of coercion probably ought to be avoided, but, on the whole, the modern "libertarian" movement does not attack or condemn the basic concept of government in and of itself, as traditional Anarchism does. The "libertarians" believe government is not harmful but is in fact desirable when it is provided by what they call "free contracts". The distinction here, in other words, is that while Anarchists oppose all government because they oppose what it is that governments do, the "libertarians" (again, in the

modern usage only) merely reject the particular manner in which governments are usually organized. Libertarianism, which is considered to be a phenomenon of the political Right, is rejected by Anarchism, which can be regarded (a bit imprecisely, perhaps) as a Leftist philosophy.

To Anarchists, the "libertarians'" advocacy of mercenarism is completely mistaken. For, why are the mercenaries any more to be trusted with power over our lives than any other political rulers? It is difficult to see how a person who has, for instance, suffered a beating at the hands of a so-called free-market policeman is any the less oppressed than one who has been maltreated by a policeman in the employ of the more conventional government. Libertarians object that these abuses will not occur because Constitution-like documents will contain provisions stating that they are not to occur; Anarchists say that maltreatment of the subject populace will take place no matter what the supposed sanctions, because government is, by nature, an institution which increases constantly in power, owing to a basic instability. This predisposition to shift toward more authority and to increasingly interfere in the affairs of its subjects is an intrinsic quality of all past and present governments, and it would seem to be inescapable that future governments will behave in the same way.

According to the widest traditions of humanity, government is, in fact, absolutely necessary. Do Anarchists suppose they are right while the vast majority of people, who do believe we need governments, are wrong? It would seem that to compare the relative numbers of each philosophy's adherents, Anarchists are so badly outnumbered as to be virtually discredited. Most people affirm a desire for government.

This argument that the majority is against us is not really so profound. It would be trite to point out specific in-

stances where majorities were completely wrong. History is filled with them. But more importantly, Anarchists do not even believe that the majority of the people have in reality consciously chosen to have any government. Rather, we feel, they were simply conditioned to believe the rationales for governments; and in any event, these governments usually existed even before the birth of any person who is ruled by them, making the question so obscure that most people have failed to consider it at all. The acceptance of government is an acculturated value. Who questions the germ theory of disease? This is not to imply that that theory is necessarily wrong; but considering the way we all accept it virtually on faith, for all we know, it might be wrong. This is the same way in which people used to be certain that demons and spirits existed and caused misfortune, etc. The current age may indeed be one of enlightenment—that is, enlightenment of a type pertaining to scientific theory. But let's not kid ourselves by pretending that people today are less gullible than they ever were.

If people have "accepted" government, it is no wonder. But whether this kind of acceptance has anything in common with a true, conscious choice by a person who fairly considers alternatives and is not forced into this or that *mental set* by schooling or early training, ought to be obvious—it is not any kind of actual, conscious choice at all. The truth of the matter is that the people are believers in the necessity of the State only because of the engineering of—the deliberate creation of—this self-perpetuating belief by governments themselves. They accomplish this feat through the indoctrinations of their schools, churches, and sundry means of propaganda which permeate the entire culture of nations. But whatever the truth may happen to be with respect to any particular question, we repeat that this truth is in no way affected by what the majority may believe.

Supposing that this is correct—that governments further the very attitudes required to ensure their own survival, how is it that anyone ever comes to be an Anarchist within such a milieu?

There can be no one answer to this question. Some Anarchists become so after discovering some item of literature by or about Anarchists. Or else they meet and talk with Anarchists and are swayed by their arguments. Still others (but this is the exception) reason out governmentless philosophies of their own by themselves, and only later discover what correct label to affix to their logic. But aside from just a few trends or tendencies, very little is known about the psychology of getting to be an Anarchist.

What do Anarchists do?

Like anyone concerned with changing society, they try to convince other people that government is unnecessarily intruding in this or that area, and also provide a consistent analysis showing from this that there is no necessity for it in other areas. In other words, Anarchists propagandize. Propaganda, despite the bad overtones which the word has acquired, (because of the bad example set by governments, actually) is literally the only way to root the State out of its position, for the nature of government is such that if people did not—as we say—legitimize it by permitting it to make decisions binding them, it could not exist.

Our propaganda can be through the word, in writing, public speaking or personal conversations; or, in certain instances, propaganda takes the form of some demonstration specifically against government (as contrasted to demonstrations which call upon the government to perform some action). But in no sense is our propaganda modeled after the propaganda of governments, which practically ram their messages down the people's throats with high-pressure salesmanship. We can do without high-pressure

salesmanship. We want to convince people in a rational way, not create another reflection of the unthinking acceptance people maintain for government. To try to create an Anarchist society in that way would be disastrous. Blind acceptance of anything is antithetical to the Anarchistic ideal of freedom which desires to bring about a condition of freedom that can only exist when people think for themselves.

Your answers make no mention of assassinations or the use of bombs, activities with which Anarchists are inevitably associated in the public's mind. What about this association with violence which Anarchism has; is there any basis for it?

We feel there is not. The philosophy of Anarchism is not intrinsically related to the question of violence, even if some Anarchist individual may occasionally (as all kinds of people do) commit some sort of violent act. Anarchists are unfairly linked with violence. When some Democrat kills another in a bar, no newspaper ever reports that "a self-avowed Democrat killed one man and injured two in a brawl at the..." etc. But let an Anarchist do something like this and see the condemnation which is heaped upon the whole movement. In reality, we have heard of clean-cut Republicans who have climbed with rifles up into high towers from where they insanely kill innocent passers-by below. Are Republicans universally stigmatized because of this?

Violence is, at least at the present stage of human development, something of a universal activity. At times it may even be necessary, when one must defend oneself, resist a dictator, etc. But it is in no way an integral part of Anarchist beliefs.

This is unfortunate if Anarchism is precluded from an intelligent appraisal because of its bad name. Why don't Anarchists call themselves by some other name and get around the problem?

Because that doesn't work. The only reason Anarchism has such a bad name is that people with a vested interest in government have deliberately slandered us. The syllables of the word did not just magically acquire all this connotation of evil, and the fact is that we Anarchists are not the monsters that we are made out to be—so somebody had to see to it that we were systematically denigrated. Thus we feel that if we called ourselves "sans-governists", or some other name we could invent, IT would eventually suffer also the same predictable libel in newspaper articles and children's textbooks, and so what is the use? Anyhow, as Anarchism has no leaders to impose usage, there is no way of ensuring uniformity even if we desired it, which, at least here, we don't. Governments can change whole nations from one system of terminology to another merely by imposing it as law. Anarchists think that that itself is a thing to oppose.

Occasionally, as an experiment, Anarchists have individually tried calling themselves by some other name. But then, when they speak to people, their hearers are not fooled. After a little while they exclaim: "Why, you're just an **Anarchist!**" There's no escaping it, and anyway we're a bit proud to be so disreputably thought of by a culture wherein violence, crime, and inhumanity called law and order, are rife.

How would public services be organized under Anarchy? First of all, I should remark that it is a mistake to talk about life "under" Anarchy. There is no "under". The implication of "under" is that a uniform system is to be imposed upon everyone, and that standard solutions to societal problems will be accepted and take precedence over the ones of today, so that instead of living under the present system, we live under a new one. In reality, the nature of the projected pluralistic Anarchy is such that a wide diversity is not only tolerated, but encouraged. Many techniques, not merely a single one, would

find acceptance among varying groups of people who had different ideas about what they wanted to accomplish, and different criteria to determine if they were succeeding at it.

Very often, when a person says "public services", he or she has in mind something quite definite, and simply assumes that everyone else postulates the need for it too. As an example, some would claim that free public schools are their idea of a necessary service which would have to be provided for. Others, who have different ideas about how learning takes place, see no need whatever for schools. The idea here isn't to make one or the other of these groups "give in"; instead we should adopt a live-and-let-live attitude and not try to figure out ways to force people who don't want or need schools (for example) to help set them up and keep them going; or to prevent others who are interested in them from implementing their ideas. People's opinions about what is necessary are often greatly unlike each other, and this is as it should be. But today, under the governmental system, even people who oppose the public schools and who never make use of them are compelled to pay for them. The essence of this system, unlike Anarchy, is standardization and uniformity. Under it, everyone in an entire country can be forced to aid in the realization of one person's pet project. In the Anarchy, or freely constituted network of voluntary relationships, "public services" would be organized anywhere that people were interested in seeing them made reality, and would be made possible by the help of like-minded individuals who would support the projects if they wanted them. Similarly, people would be under no compulsion to support projects which they felt were undeserving, and if *nobody* believed that some "service" was necessary, it very likely would disappear until such time as interest rekindled and people were willing to extend support again.

This is the reply to every question about roads,

schools, hospitals, post offices, and the like. As for the objection that people might, for example, travel on a road that they had not helped to pay for, my answer is: so what? Is that an argument against the free society? If so, it is an argument against the coercive society too, because even with compulsory funding through taxation, some people never do contribute to the maintenance of services which they use. If one-third of the whole population saw the necessity for establishing medical centers, and did so, and if then deadbeats from the other two-thirds of the people began to "steal" use of the service, such a service could probably not continue to function, and would cease. In the event that this happened, and if there was still a need for medical services, personal responsibility would of necessity reappear among the irresponsible portion of the people.

But more likely than this is that changes in attitudes resulting from the abandonment of the present governmental system of institutionalized irresponsibility would already have precluded any such desire arising to evade payment for services rendered. In any case, within a short time, free interaction would tend to establish a high level of personal responsibility. Importantly, as long as government exists, self-reliance and responsibility are constantly eroded, making more laws "necessary" to force compliance; of course, this has the effect of eroding self-reliance even further. . .

Admittedly there are many wrongs and abuses. We all recognize that government has become too large and its bureaucracy has intruded into areas where it is completely unneeded. But wouldn't you agree that it is somewhat unrealistic to demand an end to government altogether? Wouldn't it be better to try to simply reduce government to an acceptable level?

For us, no level is acceptable. We refuse to pay for "services" which we hate and reject, and of course gov-

ernment cannot function at all without taxation. "Liberal" governments only reshuffle priorities. And so-called "limited" governments somehow never stay "limited" at all. The government of the United States is a fine example of a government which once operated on a much lower scale but which, in a process greatly resembling maturation, "grew up" from its "limited" infancy into an "unlimited" monstrous adulthood. What good were its limits, when they are finally outgrown?

The reason there can be no acceptable level, even if a lower level of government could be attained and kept, is that, as the basis of all governments is robbery, or compulsory taxation, any talk of "good governments" is only pretense that there is such a thing as good *robbery*. As with murder, the principle itself is wrong. There are no good governments.

The only meaningful change that can be made in government is to change its gathering of income from a demanded requirement to a request which can be ignored, and to remove the authoritarian nature from it so that no one *must* listen to it, abide by its decisions, support it, be bound by it. But since to remove these authoritarian attributes from government, is to remove the very qualities that makes government government, we say that there can be no meaningful change in it except that kind that abolishes it entirely.

As for the objection that we are "unrealistic", government itself is, in our view, the more unrealistic; it promises peace but delivers war. It institutionalizes robbery as its means of "protection" against the criminals who might commit robbery. Its conscription enslaves us so as to force us to defend ourselves against enslavement by foreign countries' governments. Its police surveillance, its continually augmenting pile of laws to which no one can be safe from accidental disobedience, show that in "protecting" us, government actually in-

vades farther than the alleged criminal or anti-freedom elements from which we are "protected." Government is an unrealistic, unworkable, utopian dream. It has been so *demonstrated* and *proved* countless times.

People feel that without a system of laws and police, there would be chaos in human society. Don't you think that there is some real basis for this fear?

If there is such a basis in reality, it is only a product of the present authoritarian order. Suppose a heroin addict claims he cannot live without his drug; does that mean that heroin is a basic human need? That would be getting things backward—mistaking *effects* for *causes*.

In other words, I mean that the supposed "need" for government is an artificial dependency, manufactured by those in control who naturally want to stay in control. We Anarchists think that people can live in peace with a really low incidence of true crime, once the responsibility-destroying cause of today's "crimes"—namely, the authoritarian system of laws and enforced morality—is finally removed.

You mean you are saying that the Anarchist society might still have some crime? Isn't this a justification for retaining government?

Not unless government itself could reduce crime to nothing. The fact of the matter is, government increases all the time, but *so does crime*. If the governmentalsists were right, as government increased, crime would decrease. Yet this does not happen; in fact, the opposite happens. It is possible that random, arbitrary crimes will always take place; however, we do know that all of the so-called "victimless crimes" are not really crimes in any sense, and with the abolition of government, the whole category of crimes occasioned by the existence of government now, including tax evasion, draft resistance, "sedition", lese majeste, etc., would simply no longer exist. As for the others, the true crimes such as murder,

rape, robbery, and so on, these appear to be symptoms of the present cultural disorder perpetuated by government, rather than the justification for government as some people erroneously imagine.

In a social situation wherein a cancerously expanding series of laws renders more and more possible varieties of behavior illegal and "criminal", the number of so-called criminals is bound to increase. This is an obvious reason to stop, before everyone is turned into a "criminal", and it is equally a reason to reverse the process so that the laws diminish. The end of the diminishment of laws, the condition of no laws—the Anarchy—is our ideal.

So you do admit that some random violence against persons might occur as a result of unpredictable factors and unbalanced individuals. Wouldn't we need protection from these acts of violence?

By "protection", I presume you mean police?

Yes.

Then what if the "unbalanced individual" whom you are so worried about happened to be a policeman?

I suppose I would have to protect myself.

Indeed you would, provided that you had not already delegated so much responsibility and power to your protector-attacker that you had no defenses left. But this is an argument against the State again, not against Anarchy, for in the free society the ultimate protector is yourself—you who are in this incorruptible.

But as for the original objection, I answer that life is a series of risks which everybody has to take. Intelligence or stupidity will maximize or minimize our chances for survival, but there is never any guarantee that a person is absolutely safe. As you amble along the city sidewalk, you risk having a flowerpot plunge into your skull from a point seventeen stories above. You may burden yourself with a steel umbrella, or drive an armored car everywhere you go, from neurotic fear of falling objects, but you have

really solved nothing. Such "solutions" only substitute a more onerous burden for that posed by the original risk, and lower life's quality farther than the previous danger. Exactly the same is true in the case of the State and in the case of police, armies, and other such stultifying and ruinous remedies for the unknown problems of our existences.

Regardless of their several faults which you have pointed out—that they are ordered in compulsion, based on a technical theft which is taxation, and maintained solely by popular prejudice excited through propaganda—haven't the world's governments still done the best that could be done to make civilization progress?

Isn't it true that for all their lackings, governments are familiar and predictable, while Anarchy, which has never been tried, is completely unpredictable?

What about revolutionary governments, such as those of the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China—aren't those at least closer to your position, and therefore less to be condemned?

I will answer these questions in order, with a short preface: Government is essentially a hysterical reaction to existing conditions. Whereas ordinary people will normally rank interpersonal violence as a last resort of social breakdown or crisis, government operates with violence as its immediate priority; determined courses of action are *decreed*, not voluntarily decided upon; *ordered*, not freely accepted. If the principle of government were extended consistently and uniformly throughout society, true chaos would result—every civilized relationship would give way to the gun or knife: force, not persuasion. We have only the principle of Anarchy operating—the principle of no compulsion—to thank for the fact that the present social condition is not as faulty as it might be. Numerous social interactions even today still take place with an absence of compulsion, although State-ordained procedures are of course increasing daily. In the remain-

ing spontaneous relationships between persons there is no ubiquitous policeman interceding (yet); nonetheless, most transactions, conversations, even quarrels, are accomplished without resort to coercion. Government's standard operating procedure is to use coercion first and discuss matters afterward: "Under penalty of three years in the federal penitentiary or \$10,000 fine, or both, you are herewith required to..." etc. This reversal of proper order, and exaggerated tendency to resort to force, is completely typical of governments; the tendency to place social compulsion uppermost is certainly not natural or justified. It should be noted that even those people who defend government get along fine without it in their relations with friends or neighbors, most of the time, and would think a person rude, insulting and violent who behaved privately as governments do publicly.

I reply to the above questions thusly: To the extent that people have been able to ignore their various governments, civilization has progressed. If we were to have a method to calculate what the world would be like today had the thousands of wars of history not occurred; if we could determine what negative effect was exercised by the numberless benighted laws, arrogances, and interference of governments, we would see that their existence has retarded and hampered the actual advance of of mankind, rather than aiding it.

And true, governments are familiar and predictable enough. In all the literature of the subject there is not one recorded instance of a government following any other course than that of compulsion and arbitrary authority, growing constantly in power, until it intrudes into the whole of society, at which point society can no longer function and a revolution is made necessary to throw off the chains of bureaucracy and repression. Then, promptly, tragicomically, they institute a new government which itself travels full cycle and has to be overthrown in a few

years more. Yes, this is all quite familiar.

But the social principle of Anarchy is familiar and predictable also. Whenever one person helps another; whenever people solve their problems and no policeman or law instructs or compels—in short, at the taking place of any human development which is not mandated, ordained, decreed, controlled or interfered in by a legislature or by someone acting so as to force a result, we have the principle of Anarchy at work. It is ordinarily claimed that this social Anarchy, which is thought to be evil, can only be overcome and regulated by governments, which are thought to be necessary, so that society can “work”. I assert that this explanation is false and the exact opposite of the correct description of affairs, which is that the social principle of government, itself evil (in the sense that it does harm) is only overcome so that society can work, by the principle of Anarchy, or freedom, spontaneously asserting itself in the uncontrolled interstices of the social matrix.

Only selective enforcement of the laws and widespread disobedience of them prevents the chaos of unworkable regimentation. If the laws are “made to be broken, why make them at all?

Whoever has had an idea which would have increased the leisure and pleasure of all people, (this is the purpose and definition of progress) has labored to defy the massed force of social compulsion—government—and, when succeeding, has achieved a true victory for Anarchy.

The self-styled revolutionary nature of some governments deserves only contemptuous disdain from Anarchists. Some crisis of “the heroic party” or some alleged danger to “the people’s State” inevitably provides a justification for suspension of civil liberties, crackdowns on artists, stoppage of critical commentary, etc. If such societies continue to function, it is in a limited sense: the people are watched and checked, and everyone salutes,

robotlike, or parrots slogans. These are not "closer" to the Anarchist position, but rather, more remote from it. **But wouldn't an Anarchist society be just as repressive as the Statist ones, only to a different class of people? For instance, wouldn't the occasional governmentalist be in the same position then that the Anarchist is now, that is, as a persecuted "radical"?**

Today there is a legal-judicial system in existence, responsive to the whims of the ruling class, which carries out sanctions against people who are "different". In the contemplated Anarchy there is neither a judicial system nor a ruling class. Nor are Anarchists worried about "subversion" of their society's principles because the very same forces that grew powerful enough to force the demise of the State through refusal to support it any longer, would presumably act to assure that it did not reappear. Provided that there was anybody who felt masochistically displeased at the scarcity of bosses or tyrants or ruling cliques to order their lives for them, perhaps such pathetic individuals would cater to each other's peculiar deviance. If there were any such frustrated authoritarians, they would naturally be quite free to denounce the Anarchist society through their own press and through speeches, and so on. Undoubtedly they would provoke lively discussions and disagreements—perhaps even serve a necessary function by way of contrasting as "horrible examples" and so illustrate the advantages of the free society.

The Anarchist revolution is not intended to substitute any new ruling group for old. Unlike other revolutionaries, Anarchists have no "ulterior motives" for carrying on their work: no promised positions in a "provisional government" or assured berths as prominent officials "after the revolution." There's nothing in it for Anarchists except the satisfaction of working for their own freedom and that of others.

Can the goal of Anarchism be achieved, and if so, how? A considerable amount of re-education will have to be accomplished before people come to see the desirability of ending the perpetuation of government. Unless people

agree that government is unnecessary, simple destruction of the existing government can accomplish nothing; popular demand would immediately put a new one in its place. When people do agree that government is unneeded, total withdrawal of support will render their governments impotent without resources and will signal their imminent collapse. As there is no Anarchist society without Anarchists, and as Anarchists are only "made" by rational discourse and understanding, these processes ought to be encouraged and actively helped along by all those who oppose government already.

It is both easy and difficult to be a "member" of the Anarchist movement. There are no entrance fees or membership cards, but everyone who has a sincere wish to participate in this quest for freedom, is welcome. Seek out other Anarchists and add your efforts to theirs; add their efforts to yours. Improve your understanding of all subjects which can be useful in this work. Constantly question every aspect of authoritarian society; launch an unremitting assault on all ignorance and superstition, and upon every common, unthinkingly-accepted notion which helps to justify the continuing delay of total emancipation. Read and listen to what other Anarchists have had to say, and disagree with them unhesitatingly at those points where they seem to be wrong. Publish, speak, write, or assist these activities; organize like-minded people so that collective as well as individual effort can be put to use to achieve our common goal!

Even so doing, success is not guaranteed. Can Anarchy be achieved? Even among Anarchists the spectrum of opinion ranges from that of the extreme pessimists, who believe that Anarchy is a beautiful ideal, but one which we will never reach, to those cheerful optimists who predict that government is all but dead already. And today's pessimists are the optimists of two years ago.

Somewhere in between these positions of great certainty, the remainder of Anarchists go on, sometimes doubtfully, but always hopefully.

ANARCHISM— The philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary.

ANARCHY— Absence of government; disbelief in, and disregard of, invasion and authority based on coercion and force; a condition of society regulated by voluntary agreement instead of government.

ANARCHIST— A believer in Anarchism; one opposed to all forms of coercive government and invasive authority; an advocate of Anarchy, or absence of government, as the ideal of political liberty and social harmony.

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