

Everyone knows what anarchism is ... right? I have found very few people who know anything at all about anarchism. People are often surprised to learn that the famous author and pacifist Leo Tolstoy was an anarchist, and that someone as widely respected as Noam Chomsky has at times identified as an anarchosyndicalist (Chomsky 1976). The censorship of anarchism in the United States has a long and unpleasant history. Until about 1970 Italians were the largest immigrant group in the United States. The early Italian immigrants, who were recruited for their labor by United States based companies, were mostly peasant people from Southern Italy. Many of them were anarchists, which is something corporations and the government didn't bother to find out when they were looking around the world for cheap labor they could import.

Once the United States government discovered that the Italians were anarchists the government began a program of severe harassment of Italian immigrants. There were raids on Italian neighborhoods. The Italian immigrants tried to retaliate against the government, but were unsuccessful. The disposition of the government toward Italians increased hatred and fear of Italians among other people in the population. The result was that Italian immigrants were killed in a variety of ways by government and non-government people, including KKK hangings. Eventually many of them were deported. One of the culminating moments in the history of the United States government's attack on Italian immigrants was the famous Sacco and Vanzetti case, which resulted in the arrest and eventual execution of two anarchist Italian men widely known to be innocent.

The censorship of anarchism is so thorough that it is virtually excluded from the discipline of Sociology. This is an amazing statement when one realizes how many Sociology conferences there are across the country, how big these conferences are, and how seldom, if ever, one sees a session on anarchism on a Sociology conference program. This is not to say that the discipline of Sociology has itself censored anarchism. It is to say that anarchism has been so thoroughly purged from public discourse that even Sociology, as a discipline that deals with social life issues, cannot pick it up on its radar screen. There are no high school courses that deal with the subject, few if any university courses, and no mention of anarchism in the mainstream media except to occasionally blame anarchists for any violence that occurs during demonstrations. Why the fuss? The most fundamental tenant of anarchism is that people do not need nation-state governments to tell them how to run their communities. This seems like a pretty radical point of view until we come to realize that, given the history of humankind, nation-states are a fairly recent development. At one time the vast majority of the world's people were, by default, anarchists without necessarily applying that term to themselves.

Major assumptions of anarchism: There were a number of anarchist leaders during the mid to late 1800s, and it is difficult to know who to credit as the founder of the contemporary movement. Pierre Joseph Proudhon is most often referred to as a founder of modern anarchism, but he is not a favorite choice of many contemporary anarchists. His sexism and racism eventually became widely documented and he was close friends with Mikhail Bakunin who, unlike most true proponents of anarchism, supported revolutionary violence. Proudhon was also associated with the 1848 French revolution that he did not fully support (Nettlau 1996, Sonn 1992). Emma Goldman is probably a much better representative of what anarchism stands for among most anarchists. She was born in Russia in 1869 and lived for many years in the United States. She, like many of the Southern European anarchists living in the United States, was deported for openly expressing her anarchist ideas, for helping to organize labor unions, and for organizing against United States military involvement in other countries. Within two years Goldman was also deported from Russia (by that time the Soviet Union) for opposing the violent revolutionary activity there (Shulman 1996).

The anarchist movement of the mid-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century grew out of the same concerns as did socialism. Both ideological perspectives saw the industrial revolution from the standpoint of the alienated worker, whose labor was being coercively extracted to make a few people extremely wealthy. While anarchists and socialists saw the same problem and agreed on the common connection with industrialism, they were quite different on their views regarding the role of the nation-state. For socialists, the problem was not the existence of the nation-state as much as who controlled it. For anarchists nation-states were the problem and it didn't make sense to replace one with simply another of a different kind, as was the goal of socialism.

Nation-states and human labor First and foremost, anarchism tells us that the nation-state is a contrived entity for the purpose of enabling wealthy capitalists to more effectively control the earth's natural resources and to more effectively control human labor. When the largest political entities were city-states, capitalists had to work through too many political layers to extract resources, organize large labor pools, and easily move their goods about without concern for safe passage from one place to another (Weber 1958). To anarchists, nation-states are tools

for the wealthy to help them gain control and maintain control of (through the use of violence) natural resources and human labor so that production and trade can be facilitated (Goldman 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, Sonn 1992, Chomsky 1976, 1986). From the anarchists' perspective, they were puzzled by the socialists wanting to take the nation-state from the wealthy capitalists, and then turn around and impose it upon themselves. Emma Goldman supported the Russian Revolution thinking that when victory was won the state would be dismantled. She obviously was wrong, and she eventually came to regret her support for the Russian Revolution, because it violated her commitment to non-violence as well as her commitment to human freedom (Shulman 1996, Sonn 1992). (Dis)

Organizing and controlling humans for labor With the development of nation-states much of human social life, similar to non-human social life, has been removed from the control of the people experiencing it in their local communities. From an anarchist perspective, we either work directly for corporations or work indirectly for them through the corporate controlled nation-state. Anarchists also maintain that the largest portion of the taxes Western nation-states collect from their citizens is used to pay for wars that help corporations control labor and resources in other countries (Chomsky 1993 2005), a view shared by critical political economists as well (Parenti 1995, 2011). Citizen taxes also support job training programs of various levels of sophistication, which primarily benefit the corporations. The work experience of humans in industrialized nation-states is more aversive than work required to simply maintain oneself, such as when one lives off the land or has a trade (Fourier 2005). This is an important area of similarity between anarchists and Marxists who focus on Marx's early work on alienated labor (Marx 2008). Is anarchism realistic?

Anarchism is not what most people think it is. Anarchists believe that it is within the nature of humans to be able to organize themselves into social entities around the local resources available to them, just as many indigenous communities of people continue to do. The key to making anarchist thinking useful is information. People need an accurate understanding of the circumstances surrounding their lives. Anarchists promote organizing locally as needed through participatory democracy— democracy that is ongoing and not just based on periodic elections. They also call on people to have their own vision of social reality and work toward that vision. This could involve local economies that have localized means of exchanging goods and services. Many people across the United States are living in a way that approximates an anarchist lifestyle— albeit most often not intentionally as anarchists. They are doing it out of the need to survive at a time when they, as individuals, are no longer very useful to the multinational corporations that control the nation-state. Their labor has been replaced by cheaper labor in other countries or by technology. Greater focus on the local community has also been spurred by a decrease in support from state and federal governments to cities and counties.

Misperceptions about anarchism are difficult to overcome because the federal government and corporations do not want people to focus on their local living arrangements. The same was true of Communism under the Soviet Union. Local institutions such as the family were targeted for elimination because they weakened allegiance to the nation-state. Anarchism is thus portrayed by national and some state governments as an ideology that promotes violence and bombings during disruptive demonstrations. These activities are typically the work of provocateurs labeled anarchists by government authorities. Most people who read about anarchism come away thinking that the world could not possibly be organized according to anarchist principles. Who would protect us from outside invaders? What would we do about crime? There are anarchist answers to these questions, some of which will be addressed later in this book.

For now it is important to realize that anarchism is not a state of chaos perpetuated by people bent on making trouble , as portrayed in the corporate mainstream media. Neither is Anarchism a utopian idea. It is simply a set of assumptions about the nature of humans as potentially relatively free beings: beings that, like other beings , have the capacity to create livable grassroots social entities. There is no way of life among any beings that does not have problems. The challenge of humans in the modern world is to minimize the problems they create for themselves, others, and future generations of life. Anarchism , like the other sociological perspectives, has an important role to play in understanding viable solutions to social problems. Those solutions must be based on the reality that nation-states currently exist and are not likely to completely disappear within the near future.

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