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A Call for Democratic Education Pt 1

By M.M.



The current education system has failed to meet the needs of students, teachers, and society as a whole. One reason for this is the direction the education system has headed. That being in the direction of hierarchy, standardization, and the alienation of learning from the student. This is the wrong direction, and it is captained by those who should have no say in the matter. Administrators, politicians, and directors are all people who are not in the classroom and thus are separated from the very environment they are controlling. Education must become democratic. I do not mean the idea of a "representative democracy." That is not a democracy. I mean a directly democratic education.

The current system is built upon outdated and faulty notions of what learning is. The idea that students are buckets to be filled. This has created the problem of what to fill the bucket with, leading education reform to focus on standardization. These standards breed disengagement on the part of the student and hammers out their natural creativity and innate desire to learn. Students only learn to memorize and obey, not to actually internalize the information.

Standardized testing only deepens this value of memorization and obedience. It also tells students, and society at large, that these topics are what is considered intelligence. This is not to say that some students aren't able to survive this environment with good grades, but it is at the cost of their creativity and ability to learn. Many have to struggle needlessly hard, and many more fail and grow to despise learning. This system lacks adaptability, student engagement, and the environment to foster a love of learning. Teachers, as hard as they try, are not in a position to fix this. The system itself is inherently flawed, and the teachers are not in a position to change the system. Education reform is not handled by teachers, but by people completely removed from the classroom.

To counter the current system and address the flaws within it, democratic education provides answers and an alternative. Where the current system builds from hierarchy, democratic education's foundation starts within the classroom. It is based upon values of student-centered education and individualized learning. Giving students a direct voice in their own education and the function of their school. In the same way a

worker should own their own labor, a student should own their own education. This is not to say the teacher is subservient to the student. It is to say that the student and the teacher are equals in the classroom, both working towards a common goal. This requires students to have direct input on aspects of the classroom, such as the syllabus, classroom rules, and how they are to be evaluated. This can also expand outside of just the classroom, but also to the school level. Allowing students a direct say in how the school operates and their curriculum. Students and teachers would work together in free and open discussion to better meet the needs of both. Skeptics might call this utopian, but there are real-world examples we can draw from. Ranging from the anarchist schools of Spain, the Ferrer Movement, the Yasnaya Polyana school of Leo Tolstoy, or the Free School Movement.

To achieve this, it is important to build the system we want within the system of old. It is not enough to simply build the schools we want as alternatives and outside of the system, but to change the system from within through organizing. Students must organize themselves into horizontally

organized student unions. Unions that are built around the ideas and principles of anti-hierarchy, free association, mutual aid, discussion and consensus, and egalitarianism. Students need to organize and work with their teachers as well as other essential staff of their schools in order to create an environment that is reflective of these unions. A school that is designed around these ideas and principles. This should not be limited to just your school but also spread and coordinated with other schools as a large-scale movement. We must demand systemic change, not just superficial concessions. This responsibility is also not left solely in the hands of the students, but all necessary aspects of a school. Teachers, janitors, secretaries, school drivers, librarians, and all roles deemed necessary for a school's function should also organize and work together to achieve this change.

The system as it stands now fails to meet the needs of anyone but the state and the capitalists. It is not a system of education, but of domination and exploitation. It is felt by everyone who works in these schools. This necessitates change, change that must come from the bottom. This is a call for action for

all who are failed and exploited by this system to build a new system around the ideas of democratic education. A system of equality, a love of learning, and freedom. Students, organize yourselves. Talk to your friends and peers and organize your classrooms. Talk to your teachers and include them. Build democratic classrooms and cultivate them in other classrooms. Teachers, talk to your coworkers and your students and build this change together. Administrators and politicians work against your interests because it profits them. Make the school function despite them and without them. Unionize, demand this change, and accept nothing less.

YOU DON'T NEED

COPS, BOSSES OR POLITICIANS



Marion Koshy

Typically, when people are told about anarchism or anarchy in general, they are greeted with images of bombs exploding, unprovoked violence, and scenes from apocalyptic movies and shows. The "strong" reign, and the "weak" are powerless to stop them. The way society is now, but without cops or someone to "protect" people. But this is not what anarchism is about, anarchism is more complex than this simplistic summary.

Anarchism is a unique and flexible social theory that gives you, the individual, the ability to determine your destiny and complete self-determination. Anarchism allows you to fulfill your potential, pursue your goals, and live life without being hindered by structures that obstruct your ability to live freely.

A common argument is that anarchism would give people the power to restrict other people's freedom, but when self-determination is given to everybody, nobody can restrict other people's freedom without consequences. The power to determine your destiny does not mean the power to be free from the consequences of your actions. We have an interest in maintaining anarchism to prevent

people from building structures that would destroy freedom. This can be achieved by actively communicating with each other about our desires, and engaging as a group to bring about and maintain this freedom.

These may be interesting ideas, but very big claims. Naturally, one may have questions on the specifics of anarchism. This pamphlet will aim to illustrate what anarchism is, anarchist critiques of our current society, what anarchists suggest as alternatives, and what anarchism looks like in practice.

What are Anarchists Against?

The title of this zine could be seen as edgy and provocative. However, you would have a much safer, freer, and more enjoyable existence without police, bosses, or politicians. Additionally, you would have a much better life without banks, prisons, and economic systems that force us to compete with each other, and destroy our finite ecosystems for the sake of profit.

Many of these entities are assumed to be "natural" (which is a problematic word itself). People often think that these are elements of our societies that have been

around forever. However, this is untrue. A look at history or any sort of anthropology book would say the opposite. For example, humanity has only been forced into nation-states for the past 200 years or so. Compared to the thousands of years of human history, the nation-state has been only around for a tiny fraction of our existence. These entities have only been created to oppress other people.

These constructs: Capitalism, Money, and the State, are not physical entities, or things that one can see or touch. Rather, they only exist because some people at some point decided that they should exist. While these constructs may not be real, they still affect our actions and relationships to one another. Simply put, our acceptance and support of these constructs cause us to act in a certain way, and ultimately impacts the way we see things and make decisions.

"Food costs money," or "You need to pay rent," or "We need to vote to get what we want", are only truths because we agree and maintain them. Markets, Rent, Private Property, and Money in general are inherently mythological and are as materially real as any

fantasy. We choose to enforce them and make them into reality. These are human inventions that upon further examination can be changed or destroyed. Any power created by humans can be changed by humans.

Therefore, anarchists push for the abolition of these constructs and structures that have such control over our lives. If we didn't need to spend 40 hours or more working to pay rent, food, and other necessities of life, and instead reclaimed that time as our own, we'd have more time towards activities that enrich our lives. The only question is: how do we achieve this freedom?

What do Anarchists suggest?

You may ask then: what do you suggest? What do the anarchists have to say, if they oppose all of these ever-present structures? Before I address this, it is important to note that Anarchism is inherently a flexible and fluid ideology. Because of this, I can't assert to have the only solution for all these things. It would be quite contradictory to proclaim that everyone can determine their destiny while also proclaiming to have the solution to everything.

Anarchism as a framework gives you the freedom to identify what is the biggest injustice in your communities, your personal life, and your relationships, and gives you a set of ideas and practices so that you're able to figure out what works for you. There are no defined leaders, political programs, organizations, or vanguards that claim to know the solutions to our problems. The variety of answers can be overwhelming, but that portrays the flexibility and ultimately, the beauty of anarchism as a framework.

This is why it is flawed to look for leaders, the most perfect ideas, or the most correct definition. It is also erroneous to try to plan for every contingency and try to fully map out how all of this would work. Our future is not determined, and it is ultimately up to us all to build the society that we would like to see.

Beyond just what anarchists don't believe in, there are a range of beliefs that anarchists tend to hold. In short, Anarchists advocate for a society in which people can make informed decisions for themselves without the threat of violence or coercion.

As mentioned earlier, self-determination is a core ideal of anarchism. What we mean by self-determination in an anarchist context is that individuals themselves can determine their futures, and how exactly they wish to achieve their goals. On a more structural scale, this means that everyone can participate and make decisions for themselves. This means that self-determination extends from the individual, rather than a set of rules, societal norms, and rights that can be easily taken away by the state. When all individuals are entrusted with the ability to determine their destinies, then the threat of a centralized body or informal hierarchy to take away their freedoms is destroyed.

However, the only way that this personal freedom could even exist is through some level of interaction with each other, meaning that people have to work together to maintain this freedom. By everyone being able to have self-determination, power is decentralized across all members of this society, meaning that no one person can truly claim to wield political power over other people.

To create this sort of situation in the first place, anarchists usually advocate

building structures that embody anarchist values which not only take care of people's needs but also build the foundations of anarchist society. These structures build the necessary conditions for the anarchist movement to build on itself and thrive. This also serves to create a sense of direction towards what an anarchist society could look like and to establish a link between our current struggles against oppression and a liberatory society. This process is known as prefiguration.

When it comes to economic systems, some anarchists instead propose a form of socialism as a way to address the inherent inequality within capitalism. To some, socialism seems contradictory to the ideals of anarchism. The concept of socialism is commonly portrayed as meaning "big government", but this is false and absurd. Socialism is simply a system where the community at large controls production, distribution, and consumption so that what is produced, distributed, and consumed is in the interests of the community, instead of a few individuals controlling all these things for their self-interest.

The anarchist conception of socialism is also re-organization of the economy to where bosses no longer control production, distribution, and consumption; rather it is in the hands of the community at large. In addition, this means that workers are now free to determine their futures and organize themselves to meet the needs of the community without needing a boss or a bureaucrat to "organize" them. This conception of socialism integrates a critique of hierarchy and centralized governing power so that ultimately, the potential of socialism can be achieved by the individuals that reside in a community.

Anarchists also oppose the state or the government in general. Those who would think anarchism is impossible, or that it is absurd, might reflexively respond that anarchists instead would argue for a society where everyone is free to commit violence against each other. What this fails to consider is that the violence that exists in current society cannot be solved by the police, or the government despite their supposed best efforts.

The oppression and violence against communities that create crime are caused by the police, and the state itself. Rather than tackling the root causes of violence, governments instead meet violence and crime with disproportionate amounts of force that does not solve, nor mitigate crime. Anarchists believe that the state itself perpetuates violence by not addressing the root causes of crime: poverty, and lack of community. Furthermore, the state has no interest in resolving crime because it would put the police out of business, and would get rid of prisons that rely on the exploitation of the labor of prisoners.

To respond to this violence, anarchists believe that when everyone can determine their own futures and make their own decisions, they have an interest in opposing any sort of violence that would destroy this freedom. The creation of communities of care, where the individuals within the community resolve to take care of each other, would mitigate violence, if not put an end to it.

Anarchists generally think that power should be concentrated in the hands of the people, or the masses at large. Individuals

who live in their communities are more in tune with the needs and issues of their community than any politician who claims to represent them.

The ability for people to determine their own futures through economic self-organization and the decentralization of power amongst individuals is integral to anarchism. Without people being able to achieve their freedom in both the economic and political spheres, freedom cannot be achieved. Anarchism sees economic and political self-organization as necessary to achieve a free society.

So does Anarchism only oppose the State and Capitalism?

Anarchism is more than just being against the State or Capitalism. It's a broad framework that advocates for a society in which individuals are empowered to develop themselves as people. To be able to expose themselves to the wonders of this world, and to explore themselves freely spiritually, mentally, and physically. To enjoy the solidarity and companionship of other people without unnecessary division and power

imbalances that put people against other people. To be able to create freely without being concerned about personal profit. It is also a framework that advocates for us to reanalyze the dynamics in our society, to see if they're beneficial for us, or if they are instead limiting us.

Hierarchies such as Capitalism, Patriarchy, Ecocide, Racism, and Queerphobia fundamentally create a situation where someone has "power over" someone else, or something else, and uses that power to limit other people's freedom, or to destroy someone's ability to determine their destiny.

The point of anarchism is essentially to find all these oppressive hierarchies and to uproot them and to instead build new dynamics that are free from oppression.

So how do we Practice Anarchism?

So, if you think that people are better off making their own decisions instead of relying on a government that doesn't care about them, that we should not work menial jobs to survive and afford necessities, and care about actively creating a better world - you might be an anarchist!

If this all sounds great to you, that's wonderful! The best way to be an anarchist is to practice anarchism. What good are beliefs if you cannot act on them? Furthermore, you don't need to wait for permission from a political party or some leader. Consider joining a local collective that aligns with your values, or perhaps start your own anarchist project!

Anarchism in practice looks unconventional when compared to other political ideologies. There are no membership cards, no anarchist political parties to join, and generally anarchists don't run for office. Anarchists usually focus on doing action outside of the political system to build an anarchist society.

This alternative manifests itself as direct action. As the name suggests, anarchists directly act to achieve their objectives without asking for permission from authority. Anarchists achieve their belief in their autonomy by focusing on direct action that addresses the instances of oppression in their communities. Direct action manifests itself by organizing food and clothing drives

for the unhoused, writing to incarcerated prisoners, giving out HRT to trans people in need, and much more. Direct action primarily centers around doing things physically in your communities, to meet a need or to fight against oppression.

Anarchist organizing often consists of encouraging mutual relationships that respects the freedom and needs of one another. This can manifest through a culture of mutual aid, where people assist each other without expectation of repayment. This is also supported by increasing people's ability to organize themselves so that they can make informed decisions without interference by self-proclaimed leaders. This ability to make informed decisions is built by mutually sharing knowledge so that there aren't any tasks that are reliant on a single person to be accomplished. By sharing knowledge, building up mutual relationships, and respecting the boundaries and needs of other people, we build more resilient communities.

We take respect for freedom and mutual support into our organizing on the ground, where no one person is responsible for a certain action. An example of this would be

anarchists organizing a food distribution. They would get more than one person to be responsible for cooking, shopping for items, and distribution of food to the unhoused, as well as people being able to take over certain functions when someone is sick or isn't able to make it. That way, there's no single person who can take advantage of the group's reliance on them and exert power over the group, or a single person whose absence would stop the group from being able to function. Through our actions and building these systems of mutual support, we can bring in more people and therefore increase our ability to do more actions exponentially.

Anarchists also participate in social struggles that currently exist in society. The struggle for freedom is dear to anarchists, so you'll often find anarchists participating in social movements that currently exist. Anarchists use the principles of direct action so that protest movements can have teeth, rather than waiting on politicians to make changes. This often looks like participating in protest movements, engaging in blockades, doing banner drops, and engaging in physical activity so that the demands of movements can be advanced. In social movements, anarchists

also oppose people who use social struggles for clout, or politicians who want to take advantage of movements to boost their electoral campaigns. This is in line with the anarchist ethos of self-determination and anti-hierarchy, to prevent a movement from being just represented by a few select groups of people who then can use the movement energy to further their own goals.

Anarchists also often organize into collectives, organizations, or groups based on affinity to work on projects in their communities that can help build a better society. This can be through specific projects, like the aforementioned food distribution, prisoner solidarity groups, or other projects that are based around mutual aid. Some collectives are created for a specific protest movement so that anarchists can coordinate together and resist attempts by leaders to take over the movement. Another example also includes the creation of anarchist organizations that function as radical communities where anarchists can coordinate and expand on projects to build an anarchist presence.

We wish to build a better society based on these principles to guide our decisions on what we want to do to achieve what we want. Anarchists refer to this as linking our means with our ends. The way that we operate ultimately defines what our society look like. By organizing without leaders, building structures that operate on the consent of everyone involved, and a culture of mutual support and respecting everybody's freedom, we are essentially creating what we want our society to look like. Anarchists don't believe you can end oppression by creating new hierarchies and oppressive forces.

How do Anarchists plan to abolish Systems of Oppression?

Some might be curious about how anarchists exactly plan to abolish systems of oppression and achieve Anarchism. While anarchists differ on exactly how to go about this, a prominent concept that some anarchists espouse is social revolution. To create a better society, the fundamental parts of oppressive systems such as capitalism, the state, white supremacy, and more can't be legislated away. Why would those who benefit

from this system give you the tools to get rid of the system they profit from?

While some might think that revolution is a violent proposition, the anarchist conception of revolution isn't an entirely violent affair. While revolution involves the process of tearing down systems of oppression, revolution also is involved in the creation of communities of care that are necessary for healing divisions that are caused by the current system. Social revolution isn't just a violent catastrophic event where anarchists spontaneously take over the capitol and declare anarchy over the span of a day, or a year.

Rather, anarchists see social revolution as a continual process in which we build the structures here and now, that emulate the society that we want to see. As mentioned earlier, this is where the process of prefiguration comes in. This development of structures help propel our movement towards small-term gains in real-time, and as more and more people come into those structures, the potential of what we can achieve exponentially increases. These small-term gains look like the reclamation of public spaces so that

people can gather without the expectation of paying, creating spaces where people can learn more about anarchist ideas, and tying different struggles together to create a movement that combats all intertwined systems of oppression.

These might be rather lofty goals, but we can start building a better society by building the infrastructure for one today. Working through small-term goals consistently, such as setting up infoshops to spread ideas, mutual aid, and participating in social struggles, anarchists can show that a better world is possible through our actions.

Hopefully, you'll be inspired to learn a bit more about anarchism through this pamphlet! You can read more about anarchism, whether on the internet or through zines like these. Perhaps you'll find a compelling worldview that speaks to you.

Recommended Reading List

Anarchy by Errico Malatesta

To Change Everything by Crimethinc

Life Without Laws by Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness

Curious to read more?



**A NEW ANARCHIST PERIODICAL
PUBLISHING ANALYSIS ON A WIDE
VARIETY OF TOPICS FROM ANTI-
CAPITALIST, ANTI-COLONIAL, ANTI-
AUTHORITARIAN, AND
MARGINALIZED VOICES.**

Check it out at
<https://beyondresistance.noblogs.org/>