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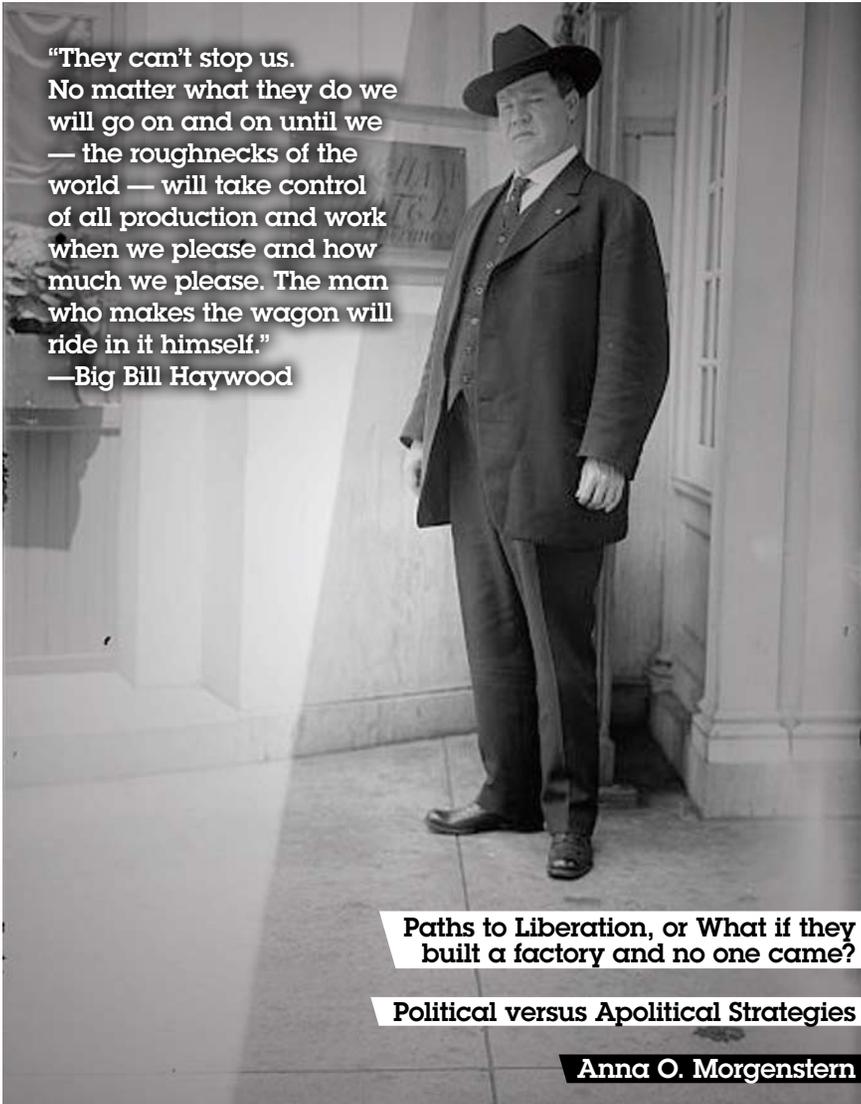
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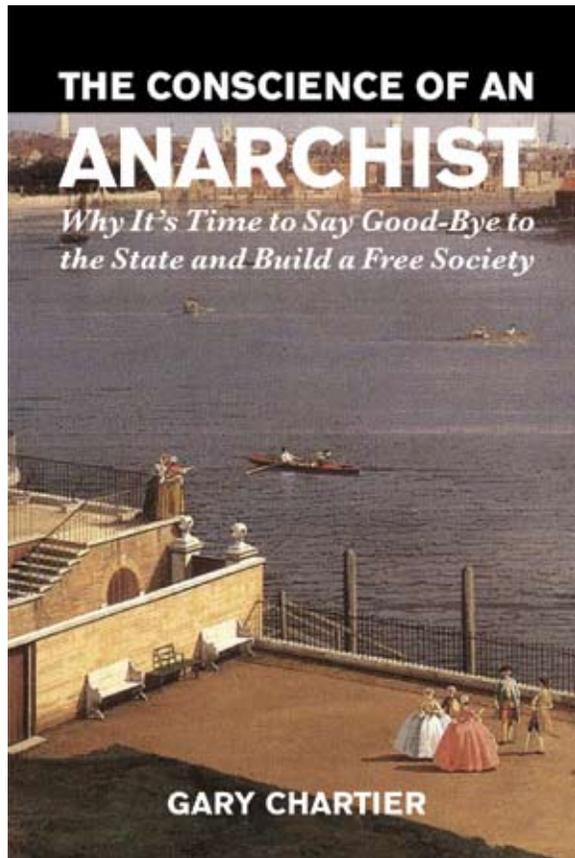
“They can’t stop us.
No matter what they do we
will go on and on until we
— the roughnecks of the
world — will take control
of all production and work
when we please and how
much we please. The man
who makes the wagon will
ride in it himself.”
—Big Bill Haywood

**Paths to Liberation, or What if they
built a factory and no one came?**

Political versus Apolitical Strategies

Anna O. Morgenstern

Vol. 7.1



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comical, irresponsible “anti-environmentalist” position that will help drive the more reasonable portion of the population into the “pro-environmentalist” camp.

The mask of political liberty and/or justice is beginning to show too many cracks. The ruling class is forced to act more and more openly and directly to keep the game of spinning plates going, as the inefficiencies and crises inherent in large hierarchic systems start

The ruling class is forced to act more and more openly and directly to keep the game of spinning plates going, as the inefficiencies and crises inherent in large hierarchic systems start to occur more frequently.

to occur more frequently. This drives more people into the grey zone, into various renegade ideologies (including simple “I don’t give a fuck”ism). This creates more crises for the ruling class — lather, rinse and repeat. The question that lies before us is whether they will be able to re-establish themselves after the collapse.

Whether they can pull a Russia and liquidate, and let the collapse act as a “blow off valve” for their structural inefficiency and come back in a slightly less totalitarian, but no less authoritarian form... or perhaps a China, where

they gradually balance economic freedom for some with cultural hegemony over all. These two nations are, perhaps, experiments for the ruling class.

We renegades must find each other and strengthen our own non-political societies, despite our differences in opinion, if we hope to provide a better alternative than these experiments.

By Anna O. Morgenstern

ALLiance Contributing Writer Anna O. Morgenstern is also a Feature Editor for C4SS.org. She has been an anarchist of one stripe or another for almost 30 years. Her intellectual interests include economic history, social psychology and voluntary organization theory. She likes piña colodas, but not getting caught in the rain.

Paths to Liberation, or What if they built a factory and no one came?

A lot of people in the broader anarchist movement seem to focus more on goals or endpoints, and ignore or underemphasize the means to achieving them. This is understandable, in that statists are constantly challenging us to identify what a stateless society will be like. (Statists are generally concerned much more with outcomes than the means to get to them, or most of them would be horribly shamed by the programs they advocate.) This creates a great deal of internecine squabbles that I think are unnecessary. Existentially, intentions are much less important in determining someone’s character than actions. Now there are many, many varieties of anarchist individuals and organizations with their own characteristics and philosophy, but I think, in terms of their program to achieve anarchism, we can divide them into 5 basic groups. I will attempt to explore these groups and their means, and see what their impact would be.

First off are the insurrectionary anarchists. Though they come in different flavors, most of them would consider themselves revolutionary anti-capitalists. Though dormant for a long time, the insurrectionary mode of anarchism was one of the oldest varieties, right alongside anarcho-syndicalism as anarchism became defined as a unique offshoot of the labor movement. The insurrectionary anarchists often get a lot of criticism from the rest of the “left” at large, criticism that I believe is un-deserved. This criticism, I believe, points to how much most people have been tamed by the powers that be, which have absorbed and co-opted their ostensible “opposition”. While I have a different “most preferred” strategy, they are certainly useful allies. When I saw the pictures from Greece, of the crowds *successfully* attacking riot police, my heart swelled.

Basically the insurrectionary anarchists follow a program of confronting capitalism when and where it exposes its major coordinating

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events, and of finding techniques to reclaim the abandoned or easily re-expropriated parts of the system for the use of the people. It is largely not a “productive” strategy, but rather a negative force, attacking state-capitalism while providing nothing for the capitalists to consume. In the beginning, food, shelter and clothing for the IAs comes from refuse or unused property, though ideally, as the revolution advances, they will be in position to make bold strikes into re-expropriation of actual exchange value. Now, this will be considered “stealing” by vulgar libertarians. But the IAs argument goes that the capitalists already stole their capacity to produce these goods from us. It would be no different than robbing the vaults where the IRS keeps their ill-gotten tax gains.

In terms of dialectical materialism, the IA movement could be seen as the revolution of the sub-proletariat, taking place in the midst of the

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incomplete revolution of the proletariat. For this reason, many statist Marxists see IAs as a counter revolutionary force... in a sense they are considered “too radical for the times”. As far as I can tell though, the IA movement, to the extent that it succeeds, provides quite a few boons to the working class.

First off, it reduces the “reserve army of the unemployed”, placing upward pressure on wage rates, by giving the workers a viable alternative to submission. Secondly, it removes goods from availability, increasing effective demand,

which, while inflationary, also adds upward pressure on wage rates from the bottom up. Plus it gives psychological relief to the bottom, marginal strata of the working class by giving them a concrete viable alternative to their situation which is not submissive but defiant and proud, not alienated but passionate.

In theory this combined pressure on the capitalists should yield shocks and amplify the basic contradictions in the system... in some areas capitalism will collapse or be forced to withdraw. In these spaces the IAs will build a new way of life (somehow), rinse, repeat.

So far the most successful IA movement in recent times has been the EZLN, the Zapatistas of Chiapas. In many areas of Oaxaca there have been large pockets of success, but a lot of backlash as well.

Then there are the Philosophical anarchists. They come in both

political structure, but not necessarily every social structure.

Being a renegade, an anarchist, an agorist or a syndicalist is a zebra of a different stripe. These are what I'd call “anti-political” or “apolitical” ideologies. In these schemes, the non-ruling class takes it upon themselves to create their own sub-society that functions outside the political-economic superstructure, rather than trying to influence that superstructure. This of course leads to conflict at the margins, which, until a certain critical mass is reached, requires stealth and evasion from the authoritarian structure.

As the superstructure grows more advanced and integrated, direct conflict becomes less and less effective as a strategy over time. So in a sense, all of the “political” ideologies are the bulwark, the front line

forces, of the ruling class oligarchy. The age of the mass strike came to an end after WWI, for the most part, in the US, and in the 60s in Europe. But there are forms of direct action that have subtly replaced this, in which workers and freelancers take back their surplus value from the oligarchy.

The response has been the warfare-outsourcing project, in which the ruling class devastates the peripheral states and then ruthlessly exploits the surviving working class there. This is what the “cold war” and now, the “war on terror”, were designed to accomplish. Orwell predicted this aspect of things in his book 1984 pretty well. Then for the core states, bread and circuses or soma, keep the population from drifting into the grey zones and keep them supporting the oligarchy. Huxley predicted this aspect of things in his book *Brave New World* pretty well.

The problem for the ruling class is that they can't really keep it up forever. We're bleeding them, and they're eating their own raw materials trying to maintain an inefficient oligarchic economy. This is the reason why “green” ideology has become popular lately. The ruling class hopes to use fear of environmental destruction in order to suppress consumption by the working class, allowing them to “sustain” corporate hegemony. The fear of environmental destruction is a real fear, but it is the state-corporate oligarchy itself which is causing the destruction. They use the conservatives as a red herring to provide a

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Each of these movements can co-exist and synergize each others activities if they can get over their philosophical differences at least for strategic purposes. That may seem like a big “if” right now, but as the state in its desperation grows more authoritarian, exposing the iron fist from below the velvet glove, the pragmatic benefits may bring all of these “direct action” movements together, at least at the margins.

Political versus Apolitical Strategies

The problem with any sort of “political” ideology is that they are largely made up of a “laundry list” of specific issue proposals. This is true whether there is an underlying consistent idea behind them or not.

Let’s first examine the favorite whipping boy of many people, “libertarianism”. The problem, as some of the more clever leftoids have argued, is that the ruling class will look through this laundry list and throw their weight behind the parts of it that strengthen their position, and discard the rest, thus making libertarianism into a less aggressively socially conservative form of conservatism.

“Lower taxes?”

Sure, let’s lower taxes for the rich.

“Less regulation?”

Well, let’s remove the regulations that counteract corporate power, but not the other ones (see: Enron).

“Legalize drugs?”

No friggin’ way, chief.

But what’s not clearly understood is that this is also true for “liberalism” and so-called “social democracy” or “democratic socialism” or what have you. Modern American “liberalism” is simply Mass Corporatism on steroids. It’s pure bureaucratism. You play nice and obey the rules and if you’re a very excellent drone you get to make money, but not too much, unless you become an insider. In some ways, it’s a bit less harsh than the conservative version of Corporatism but it’s also much harder to evade or escape. The conservatives give you more of a chance to do your own thing, but they also leave you utterly fucked if you fail.

There is no political ideology that can escape this co-optive process carried out by the ruling class. This has led to a principle called the Iron Law of Oligarchy which states that every form of political organization ends up becoming an oligarchy. I think this is true of any

anarcho-capitalist and anarcho-socialist varieties. Their essential idea is to eschew political activism largely, but to make attempts to convince people far and wide of the essential rightness of their position. In theory, this will undermine the power and prestige of the state at all levels of society. Fewer and fewer individuals will actively take part in the various workings of the state, until one day the last bureaucrat turns the lights out in the last office. Though they tend not to openly advocate the other paths, their methodology requires people to pursue them, lest this method take 100s of years. They tend to be the most pessimistic about the short term prospects for anarchism. Many anarchists will combine philosophical outreach with other strategies, though the IAs often seem to be a bit less sanguine about this, seeing it as a diversionary waste of time.

There are the “Parliamentary” anarchists. These types also come in both anarcho-capitalist and anarcho-socialist varieties. They want to “work from the inside” to undermine the state through direct engagement with its machinery. They will field candidates, vote, agitate for specific laws, etc. In theory, by pressuring the state they will force it to act against the ruling classes’ wishes, weakening them step by step until the state itself is easily abolished altogether.

[Parliamentary Anarchism] wants to “work from the inside” to undermine the state through direct engagement with its machinery.

Anarcho-capitalists who follow this path are often indistinguishable from minarchist “libertarians” except in their idea of the endgame, and possible radicalism of their proposals. Anarcho-socialists who follow this path are often indistinguishable from Fabian social-democrats except in their idea of the endgame, and possible radicalism of their proposals.

The weakness of this position is that it tends to yield a very stable state. As the radical left and right parliamentarians collide, the economic positions will stabilize around a sort of mixed economy capitalism, while civil liberties will be high and militarism low. Very much like Western Europe actually. This sort of state will eventually collapse under its own economic contradictions but if both parties are dedicated to advancing their positions it could take a very long time.

Then there are the anarcho-syndicalists, or labor-anarchists, and the agorists. Despite evolving from very different positions, these two strategies have the most in common with each other, and are capable of co-existing with insurrectionary anarchism, at least in theory. They are not political revolutionary strategies, but economic revolutionary strategies, that employ force primary as a last ditch self-defense tactic.

Anarcho-syndicalism is one of the oldest varieties of anarchism, basically evolving out of the labor movement of the 19th century. They seek to find ways to use direct action in the workplace to disrupt the employing class, while also developing alternative forms of production (often called syndicates, thus the name) that are worker-owned

In [Anarcho-syndicalist] theory the employers will be pushed back and gradually replaced, until independent workers collectives will control the means of production and the state will cease to have any meaning or power.

and often not tied into a profit motive. (Since the laborers would be receiving the full product of their labor, there would be no profit per se, no excess revenue going to a third party.) Anarcho-syndicalism is not confrontational with “capitalism” as a unified force, but confronts the capitalists inside the workplace. The IWW, while not officially “anarchist” in name, is basically a model of how this

sort of method works. They did not seek to engage the state directly, but to pressure the state to concede to their demands as workers. In theory the employers will be pushed back and gradually replaced, until independent workers collectives will control the means of production and the state will cease to have any meaning or power.

Kevin Carson’s “Labor Struggle: A Free Market Model” has a lot of historical and speculative ideas about this path in detail.

The major advantage of this strategy is that it is productive and immediate. Using the techniques of direct action gets immediate, tangible results for the working class, which empowers them to engage in further action. The major disadvantage is that it tends to draw the fire of the state, literally and figuratively. As the conditions of production

are moving away from large-scale material outlays, this methodology is becoming more and more practical again. At the same time, it is becoming more and more similar to agorism.

Agorism is the idea of counter-economic production with a philosophical underpinning of anarchism. Counter-economic production is production that exists outside of the purview or approval of the state. The black and grey markets, so called. In a sense, agorism could be seen as freelance anarcho-syndicalism. One difference is that agorism is something that can be practiced by individuals, small business owners and workers alike. The basic idea is to operate outside the eye, and thus control, of the state. Stealth, exile and cunning, as James Joyce put it, are required. This strategy is also productive and immediate, it is also direct action, only outside an official workplace.

The website agorism.info has a great deal of information about agorism and its possibilities as a revolutionary economic anarchist strategy.

The basic idea [of Agorism] is to operate outside the eye, and thus control, of the state.

As each of these paths advance, we can expect that there will be an overlap between an-syn and agorism. Unofficial unions, syndicates and labor associations will form their own production firms not dependent on a capitalist owner and in ways unauthorized by any state, thus being equivalent to agorist firms. Profit taking agorist firms and syndicates will trade with each other for parts and material and services. Both agorism and anarcho-syndicalism remove laborers and a marginal number of unemployed from the market for state-capitalist labor, thus providing upward pressure on wage rates. They are both deflationary forces, by adding goods and services to the market at lower prices than a statist firm which must absorb the costs of the state’s taxes and regulation. This puts state-capitalist firms in a vice. The state will have to expend more and more resources to fight these unauthorized mills of production, while at the same time dealing with a larger and larger insurrectionary movement. It is quite reasonable to expect that at least some anarcho-syndicates and agorist firms will donate materials and services to the insurrectionary anarchist movement, perhaps in exchange for labor or crafts, as each of these movements grow. The insurrectionary movement will develop, perhaps, into the “sword” of the anarchist movement while agorism and anarcho-syndicalism will serve as the “plowshare”.