

# The Positive Content of Anarchism





**The Positive Content of Anarchism** is a publication of the Melbourne Anarchist Club.

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## **The Positive Content of Anarchism**

Anarchism is a revolutionary social movement through which common people organise together in an attempt to exert greater control over their lives. It is committed to the idea that *"man is not*

*only the most individual being on earth; he is also the most social being"* (Bakunin), and contends that individual freedom can only be achieved through the active support of other people, and requires assisting others in turn.

Throughout its 141-year history, the philosophy and practice of the anarchist movement has emerged through an unceasing unfolding and elaboration of a single idea: autonomy.

Autonomy is not the freedom to do whatever one wants whenever one wants. Autonomy [*auto* self, *nomos* law] is the act of giving the law to oneself, both individually and collectively, and it requires thinking critically about the type of society one wants to live in,

and applying those ideas consistently in order to bring that society into being.

Unlike liberals – who mistakenly tend to see the freedom of the individual and the claims of the collective as irreconcilably opposed, and who therefore seek to limit society's claims on the individual via the promotion of exclusive property rights – anarchists understand that individual freedom and collective freedom are mutually reinforcing, and that no individual can be truly free unless he is free to participate equally, directly and collectively in all decisions that affect him. For this reason, anarchism can be understood as the extension of democracy to every institution of society. Anarchist practice is constituted by the search for creative ways to

realise this democratic commitment.

Anarchism's commitment to democracy means it is opposed to all forms of power that prevent individuals controlling their own lives through collective participation in the decisions of society:

- » Anarchists seek to overthrow capitalism, because they understand that private property means privatised control of the means of production, distribution, exchange and communication, and that this privatisation of control prevents the great majority of people from participating in the decisions that affect them.

That capitalism is essentially and necessarily exploitative is an important reason for anarchist resistance to it, however, anarchists are not merely interested in alleviating poverty via the implementation of an economic socialism. Anarchists understand that the capacity of capitalists to exploit workers is predicated on the decision-making power that private ownership confers. Anarchists desire libertarian socialism, which is socialism of a particularly political nature: a political socialism orientated not just to equality of wealth but equal participation in social deliberation. In place

of capitalism, anarchists seek to establish collective ownership in the form of democratic self-management by workers over industry.

- » Anarchists seek a reformed union movement, because they know that the rotation of members through union posts subject to limited mandate and immediate recall is the only way to stimulate an active membership and to foster fighting spirit; whereas electing officials to the comforts of paid office reduces members to a passive clientele, and leads office bearers toward stagnation,



corruption and collusion with the interests of capital. Only a fully democratic and active participation in union activities can achieve the self-organisation of workers into a mass movement capable of ending capitalism. Only a fully democratic and active participation in union activities can cultivate the spontaneity and responsibility required to ensure the democratic provision of society's needs.

- » Anarchists seek to destroy the state, because they know that its centralisation of power can only result in a self-perpetuating class of professional politicians,

who identify with and serve the capitalist and rent-seeking classes that finance their election campaigns, and whose only interest is ensuring the continued oppression and exploitation of urban and rural labour. In place of the state anarchists seek a de-centralisation of power, and the state's replacement by democratic industrial- and community-based communes, free to associate into federative structures of mutual co-operation and exchange, whilst protecting the democratic autonomy of local groups. By preserving the right not to implement initiatives they

refuse to ratify, and to secede from federations that no longer promote their interests, anarchists groups compel each other to respect the autonomy of their fellows and to associate under terms of mutual reciprocity. It is by compelling mutual respect that stable, lasting and complex modes of communication, exchange and support will be created, and from which all members of society may benefit.

Anarchism is frequently characterised as being non-political. In reality it is hyper-political and refuses, totally, any participation in that pseudo-democratic travesty known

as representative parliamentarianism, which is a fraud enacted on working masses to ensure oligarchical regimes in the service of capital perpetuate themselves as the illusion of democracy. To participate in the election of representatives, whose very being is the negation of universal political equality, not only constitutes an implicit endorsement of a regime intended to de-politicise the masses by eliciting their passive acquiescence to being ruled over by a minority clique, it entails, via its suppression of the creative and self-legislating spontaneity of the wider population, all the irrationality of self-castration.

For all their sincerely held belief in social co-operation and mutual aid, anarchists are

neither pacifists nor hippies, and anarchism is not, nor has ever been, a vision of political harmony. Political harmony is the illusion of totalitarians, and both Mussolini and Lenin, for all their differences regarding the ultimate fate of the state, were united in their shared belief in a utopia in which the political sphere would cease to exist.

Democratic politics, like all politics, is a site of agon. But only democratic politics, in which deliberation is open to the direct participation of all, is truly committed to "*the unforced force of the better argument*" and a genuine contest of ideas. Anarchy means universal and direct participation in argument and decision-making becomes the norm.

Anarchy is autonomy, individual and collective. And anarchism seeks to extend this democratic vision of a universal, direct, participatory and egalitarian politics to every institution of society.

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