

“...Anarchism is not a panacea that will miraculously cure all the ills of the body social, but rather, a twentieth century guide to action based on a realistic conception of social reconstruction...”

SAM DOLGOFF; 1971

In this classic, thoroughly documented pamphlet, the late Sam Dolgoff, lifelong anarchist activist, convincingly demonstrates the relevance of the classical anarchist tradition in the face of bourgeois neo-Anarchism, distortions by historians, and social complexity, administrative problems, and technological advance. It doubles as a discussion of Anarchist principles, revolutionary pre-conditions, and the problems of post-revolutionary reconstruction and re-organisation.

THE relevance OF anarchism TO modern SOCIETY



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by Sam Dolgoff

With a New Introduction by
Brian Oliver Sheppard

NOTES

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IS ANARCHISM RIGHT FOR COMPLEX SOCIETIES?

An Introduction by
Brian Oliver Sheppard

Sam Dolgoff, the author of this pamphlet, was born Sholem Dolgopolsky in Belorussia in 1902. His family moved from Russia to America before he was a teenager. He later changed his name to Sam Dolgoff, though he often wrote under other pseudonyms as well, most notably as Sam Weiner. A member of the IWW during its heyday in the 1920s, co-founder of *Libertarian Labor Review* (later known as *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*), and an agitator for anarchist ideas until his death in 1990, Sam became a well-respected American anarchist, attracting a steady flow of comrades and kindred spirits to his humble house in New York in his later years.

A student of the important anarchist Gregory Maximoff, who was in turn a student of Kropotkin, Sam Dolgoff served as a bridge between the era of classical anarchism (1880-1920) and the modern anarchist movement that has grown around anti-corporate globalisation issues. The decades between these two eras were generally dismal for anarchism, and yet Sam pressed on stubbornly, organising on the shop floor, on the street corner, writing for numerous anarchist periodicals, presses, and occasionally larger publishing houses. It was for one of these that he edited the essential *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution 1936-1939*.

His pamphlet "The Relevance of Anarchism to Modern Society" is regarded by many to be one of his finest. Written in 1971 according to New York University where his papers are held, it was published by *Soil of Liberty* in 1977. Referring to recent advances in cybernetics, Sam wanted to reassert anarchism's timeliness in a post-nuclear - and some would say post-modern - world.

The charge has often been made that the anarchist economic model is ill suited for complex societies. The multi-faceted nature of advanced industrial economies; their scope of operation and breadth of distribution; the extensive refinement in their division of labour - all these and more are held up as examples of the labyrinth of problems that nothing as "simplistic" as anarchism could ever hope to address. Anarchism, according to many modern critics, could only hope to work in limited, small-scale economies. And even then, only possibly.

The primitivist sect of the American anarchist movement actually seems to agree with this, and advocates destroying what it calls the "industrial mega-machine," thereby returning to small, localised, autonomous villages. This is completely at odds with what the anarchist movement has fought for traditionally. When Sam was interviewed in Paul Avrich's *Anarchist Voices*, he derided "'ox-cart anarchists' who opposed organisation and wanted to return to a simpler life. Luigi Fabbri once called this type 'bourgeois anarchists.'" Sam believed, as did Bakunin, that "it is not in the

past, but in the future, that mankind's liberation awaits."

Sam also stated that, far from being ill suited for anarchism, "complex societies necessitate" it. In this pamphlet, he delves into the subject by reaffirming that "the classical anarchists... always rejected the kind of 'simplicity' which camouflages regimentation in favour of the natural complexity which reflects the many faceted richness and diversity of social and individual life."

Interestingly, in the introduction to Daniel Guerin's *Anarchism*, Noam Chomsky states: "[S]kepticism is in order when we hear that 'human nature' or 'the demands of efficiency' or 'the complexity of modern life' require this or that form of oppression or autocratic rule."

Gabriel Jackson, award-winning historian and author of *The Spanish Revolution and the Civil War*, posits that the anarchists ruined Spain in 1936, allowing fascism to triumph in that country in the late 1930's. This was because the anarchist model could not survive in a complex economy, he says.

To wit: "[T]he revolutionary tide began to ebb in Catalonia [after] accumulating food and supply problems, and the experience of administering villages, frontier posts, and public utilities, had rapidly shown the anarchists the unsuspected complexity of modern society."

Complexity comes to the fore and foils the anarchists, it seems, allowing Franco to sweep into power.

But Noam Chomsky, in his essay "Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship" - which is one of his most anarchist writings - writes, "In fact, 'the revolutionary tide began to ebb in Catalonia' under the middle-class attack led by the Communist party, not because of a recognition of the 'complexity of modern society.'" Furthermore, "Whereas Jackson attributes the ebbing of the revolutionary tide to the discovery of the unsuspected complexity of modern society, Orwell's firsthand observations [in *Homage to Catalonia*], like those of Borkenau, suggest a far simpler explanation [namely, Communist suppression]." Chomsky continues, "The complexities of modern society that baffled and confounded the unsuspecting anarchist workers of Barcelona" seem not to exist; in fact, "[t]he available records do not indicate that the problems of administering villages or public utilities were either 'unsuspected' or too complex for the Catalan workers - a remarkable and unsuspected development."

Indeed, Augustin Souchy, who, like Orwell, was eyewitness to the collectivisation process, wrote that "The collectivisation of the textile industry shatters once and for all the legend that the workers are incapable of administering a great and complex corporation." This observation was recorded in *The Anarchist Collectives*, the aforementioned collection edited by Sam Dolgoff. Note that Souchy refers to collectivisation in the textile industry, which was an advanced manufacturing industry, and not a rural or small-scale operation. This answers the claim that anarchist administration can be successful only in small-scale industry or non-industrial operations.

Dolgoff elaborates the point further by citing Kropotkin's observation of English and Scottish workers:

cybernetic-technical revolution. Yet, the movement for emancipation is threatened by the far more formidable political, social and brainwashing techniques of "The Establishment."

In their polemics with the Marxists, the anarchists insisted that the political state subjects the economy to its own ends. A highly sophisticated economic system, once viewed as the prerequisite for the realisation of socialism, now serves to reinforce the domination of the ruling classes with the technology of physical and mental repression and the ensuing obliteration of human values. The very abundance which can liberate us from want and drudgery, now enables the state to establish what is, in effect, a nationalised poorhouse, where the millions of technologically unemployed - forgotten, faceless outcasts - on public "welfare" will be given only enough to keep them quiet. The very technology that has opened new roads to freedom has also armed states with unimaginably frightful weapons for the annihilation of humanity.

While the anarchists never under-estimated the great importance of the economic factor in social change, they have nevertheless rejected fanatical economic fatalism. One of the most cogent contributions of anarchism to social theory is the proper emphasis on how political institutions, in turn, mould economic life. Equally significant is the importance attached to the will of man, his aspirations, the moral factor, and above all, the spirit of revolt in the shaping of human history. In this area too, anarchism is particularly relevant to the renewal of society. To indicate the importance attached to this factor, we quote a passage from a letter that Bakunin wrote to his friend Elisée Reclus: "the hour of revolution is passed, not because of the frightful disaster (the Franco-Prussian War and the slaughter of the Paris Commune, May 1871) but because, to my great despair, I have found it a fact, and I am finding it every day anew, that revolutionary hope, passion, are absolutely lacking in the masses; and when these are absent, it is vain to make desperate efforts."

The availability of more and more consumer goods plus the sophisticated techniques of mass indoctrination has corrupted the public mind. Bourgeoisification has sapped the revolutionary vitality of the masses. It is precisely this divorce from the inspiring values of socialism, which, in a large extent, accounts for the venality and corruption in modern labour and socialist movements.

To forge a revolutionary movement, which, inspired by anarchist ideas, would be capable of reversing this reactionary trend, is a task of staggering proportions. But therein lies the true relevance of anarchism.

The progress of the new society will depend greatly upon the extent to which its self-governing units will be able to speed up direct communication - to understand each other's problems and better co-ordinate activities. Thanks to modern communications technology, all the essential facilities are now available: tape libraries, "computer laundromats," closed television and telephone circuits, communication satellites and a plethora of other devices are making instant, direct communication of a world scale accessible to all (visual and audio contact between earth and moon within seconds!) "Face to face democracy," a cornerstone of a free society, is already foreshadowed by the increasing mobility of peoples.

There is an exaggerated fear that a minority of scientific and technical workers would, in a free society, set up a dictatorship over the rest of society. They certainly do not now wield the power generally attributed to them. In spite of their "higher" status, they are no less immune to the fluctuations of the economic system than are the "ordinary" workers (nearly 100,000 are jobless). Like lower-paid workers, they too must, on pain of dismissal, obey the orders of their employers.

Tens of thousands of frustrated first-rate technical and scientific employees, not permitted to exercise their knowledge creatively find themselves trapped in monotonous, useless and anti-social tasks. And nothing is more maddening than to stand helplessly by, while ignoramuses who do not even understand the language of science, dictate the direction of research and development. Nor are these workers free to exercise these rights in Russia (i.e. before the wall came down - Ed.) or anywhere else.

In addition to these general considerations there are two other preventative checks to dictatorship of the techno-scientific elite. The first is that the wider diffusion of scientific and technical training, providing millions of new specialists, would break up any possible monopoly by a minority and eliminate the threat of dictatorship. "...The number of scientists and technologists in this country has doubled in little more than ten years and now forms twenty percent of the labour force - this growth is much faster than that of the population..." (*New York Times*, December 29, 1970)

The second check to dictatorship is not to invest specialists or any other group with political power to rule over others. While we must ceaselessly guard against the abuse of power, we must never forget that in the joint effort to build a better world, we must also learn to trust each other. If we do not, then this better world will forever remain a utopia.

The True Relevance of Anarchism

I have tried to show that anarchism is not a panacea that will miraculously cure all the ills of the body social, but rather, a twentieth century guide to action based on a realistic conception of social reconstruction. The well nigh insurmountable material obstacles to the introduction of anarchism - scarcity of goods and services and excessive industrial-managerial centralisation - have or can be removed by the

"[P]roduction and exchange represented an undertaking so complicated that no government (without establishing a cumbersome, inefficient, bureaucratic dictatorship) would be able to organise production if the workers themselves, through their unions, did not do it in each branch of industry; for, in all production there arises daily thousands of difficulties that... no government can hope to foresee.... Only the efforts of thousands of intelligences working on problems can co-operate in the development of the new social system and find solutions for the thousands of local needs."

Federalism, the co-ordination of voluntary bodies of producers over vast regional or even global spaces, was a principal aim of struggle for the Spanish workers as well as other activists in other countries.

A counter-question, however, is this: Is the current free market system suitable for the complexities of modern society?

In fact, the market system has itself created much of the "complexity" of modern society. For example, 30 different types of SUVs (*Sport Utility Vehicle*, such as the Lincoln Navigator or Jeep Cherokee), many with parts particular to each one, made by differing plants, each requiring their own skilled production and repair, adds a great deal to the complexity of life. Do the benefits of this kind of "complexity" outweigh the harm it causes? By contrast, complexities of human need - health care, housing, food, education, etc. - are not adequately addressed by the market system. In this sense, the state-subsidised market system of our era is extremely ill suited to the complexity of not just modern society, but of human beings.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDITION

(written late 1980's - early 90's)

The late Sam Dolgoff, a lifetime American Anarchist activist, sets out in this classic pamphlet to defend, and demonstrate the relevance to modern society of the Anarchist tradition. Writing in 1971, he argues that Anarchism is “a twentieth century guide to action based on a realistic conception of social reconstruction.”

Dolgoff's concerns in this pamphlet, well versed in both the classical Anarchist writings, as well as modern social science writing, are broad. Four main concerns stand out:

1. to distinguish classical Anarchism from the individualistic, middle-class based “bourgeois neo-Anarchism” so prevalent in his day, (and unfortunately in ours too);
2. to refute the negative myths about Anarchist achievements, principles and organisation perpetuated by a variety of recent historians including George Woodcock, author of the standard history of Anarchism;
3. to demonstrate the relevance of Anarchist principles in the face of the (increasing) complexity of modern social life, problems of social administration, and technological advance;
4. to discuss the Anarchist views on social organisation, pre-conditions for revolution, and the immediate problems that will have to be faced in the post-revolutionary period of reconstruction and re-organisation.

This pamphlet is itself highly “relevant” today. Everywhere we look, the world is in crisis: from the world recession, the collapse of the Left, the rise of fascism, to the deepening exploitation of Africa, and the so-called reform period in South Africa today. But the oppressed are everywhere organising a fightback, against the poverty, the despair, the oppression and the betrayals.

We, as Anarchists, can and must, be part of the new upsurge of struggle. This pamphlet can help us to build the movement of revolutionary Anarchism. This movement must be a movement of the oppressed themselves, and therefore be based in the oppressed classes (the workers, peasants and poor), BUT recognise oppression within the class (race, gender etc.). I believe that the Anarchist organisational principles of decentralism, federalism, direct democracy, are ideal for this libertarian worker/poor/peasant movement. This movement would seek to increase the militancy of the struggles of the oppressed, overturn the ideas of the ruling class on a wide scale and help build structures of “counter power”, of people's power.

(L. V.)

labour... would make possible the abolition of poverty at home and abroad...”²² In a consumer economy where purchasing power is not tied to production, the wage system becomes obsolete and the preconditions for the realisation of the socialist ideal immeasurably enhanced.

When Kropotkin in 1899 wrote his *Fields, Factories and Workshops* to demonstrate the feasibility of decentralising industry to achieve a greater balance between rural and urban living, his ideas were dismissed as premature. It is now no longer disputed that the problem of scaling down industry to manageable human proportions, rendered even more acute by the pollution threatening the very existence of life on this planet, can now be largely solved by modern technology. There is an enormous amount of literature on this topic. (Murray Bookchin has done an enormous amount of research on this subject - see his *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Ramparts Press, 1971)

One of the major obstacles to the establishment of the free society is the cumbersome, all pervasive, corporate-statist manned by an entrenched bureaucratic elite class of administrators, managers and officials who at all levels exercise de facto control over the operations of society. This has up till now been regarded as an unavoidable evil, but thanks to the development of computerised technology, this byzantine apparatus can now be dismantled.

Alan Toffler (*Future Shock*, Random House, 1970, p. 141) summing up the evidence, concludes that: “Far from fastening the grip of bureaucracy on civilisation more than before, *automation leads to its overthrow...*” (emphasis ours). Another source, quoting *Business Week*, emphasises that “automation not only makes economic planning necessary - it also makes it possible. The calculations required for planning on a nationwide scale are complicated and difficult, but they can be performed by the new electronic computers in an amazingly short time.”²³

The libertarian principle of workers' control will not be invalidated by changes in the composition of the work force or in the nature of work itself. With automation, the economic structure of the new society must be based on self-administration by the people directly involved in economic functions. Under automation, millions of highly trained technicians, engineers, scientists, educators, etc. who are already organised into local, region, national, and international federations will freely circulate information, constantly improving both the quality and availability of goods and services and developing new products for new needs.

By closely inter-meshing and greatly expanding the already existing networks of consumer co-operative associations with the producers associations at every level, the consumers will make their wants known and be supplied by the producers. The innumerable variety of supermarkets, chain stores and service centres of every description now blanketing the country, though owned by corporations or privately, are so structured that they could be easily socialised and converted into co-operative networks. In general, the same holds true for production, exchange, and other branches of the economy. The integration of these economic organisms will undoubtedly be greatly facilitated because the same people are both producers and consumers.

George Woodcock "...is the loose and flexible affinity group," which needs no formal organisation and carries on anarchist propaganda through an "invisible network of personal contacts and intellectual influences." Woodcock argues that "pure" anarchism is incompatible with mass movements like Anarcho-Syndicalism because they need "stable organisations precisely because it moves in a world that is only partly governed by anarchist ideals... and make compromises with day-to-day situations.... [It] has to maintain the allegiance of masses of working men who are only remotely conscious of the final aim of anarchism."²¹

If these statements are true, then "pure" anarchism is a pipe dream. First, because there will never be a time when everybody will be a "pure" anarchist, and humanity will forever have to make "compromises with the day-to-day situation." Second, because the intricate economic and social operations of an inter-dependent world cannot be carried on without these "stable organisations." Even if every inhabitant were a convinced anarchist, "pure" anarchism would still be impossible for technical and functional reasons alone. This is not to say that anarchism excludes affinity groups. Anarchism envisions a flexible, pluralist society where all the needs of mankind would be supplied by an infinite variety of voluntary associations. The world is honeycombed with affinity groups from chess clubs to anarchist propaganda groups. They are formed, dissolved and reconstituted according to the fluctuating whims and fancies of the individual adherents. It is precisely because they *reflect individual preferences* that such groups are the lifeblood of the free society.

But the anarchists have also insisted that since the necessities of life and vital services must be supplied without fail and cannot be left to the whims of individuals, they are social obligations which every able-bodied individual is honour-bound to fulfil, if s/he expects to enjoy the benefits of collective labour. The large-scale organisations, federations, and confederations supplying these necessities must therefore underpin the free society. Such stable associations, anarchistically organised, are not a deviation. They are the very essence of anarchism as a viable social order.

There is no "pure" anarchism. There is only the application of anarchist principles to the realities of social living. The aim of anarchism is to stimulate forces that propel society in a libertarian direction. It is only from this standpoint that the relevance of anarchism to modern life can be properly assessed.

Automation Could Expedite Anarchism

We consider that the constructive ideas of anarchism are rendered even more timely by the cybernetic revolution still in its early stages, and will become increasingly more relevant as this revolution unfolds. There are, even now, no insurmountable *technical-scientific barriers* to the introduction of anarchism. The greatest material drawback to the realisation of the ideal (which the anarchists hold in common with all socialist tendencies: "To each according to his needs from each according to his ability,") has been the scarcity of goods and services. "...Cybernation, a system of almost unlimited productive capacity which requires progressively less human

THE RELEVANCE OF ANARCHISM TO MODERN SOCIETY

Sam Dolgoff

Bourgeois Neo-Anarchism

Meaningful discussion about the relevance of anarchist ideas to modern industrialised societies must first, for the sake of clarity, outline the difference between today's "neo-anarchism" and the classical anarchism of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and their successors. With rare exceptions one is struck by the mediocre and superficial character of the ideas advanced by modern writers on anarchism. Instead of presenting fresh insights, there is the repetition of utopistic ideas that the anarchist movement had long since outgrown and rejected as totally irrelevant to the problems of our increasingly complex society.

Many of the ideas which the noted anarchist writer Luigi Fabbri a half century ago labelled "Bourgeois Influences in Anarchism" are again in circulation.¹ For example, there is Kingsley Widmer's article, "Anarchism Revived Right-Left and All Around." Like similar bourgeois movements in the past, Widmer correctly points out that: "Anarchism's contemporary revival... mostly comes from the dissident middle class - intellectuals, students and other marginal groups who [base themselves] on individualist, utopian and other non-working class aspects of anarchism...."² Like the old bourgeois anarchists, Widmer too, practically denies the link between anarchism and free socialism and chides Noam Chomsky for seeing "anarchism as purely integral to socialism."

Other typical bourgeois anarchist characteristics are: *Escapism* - the hope that the establishment will be gradually undermined if enough people "cop out" of the system and "live like anarchists in communes... and other life-style institutions" (Widmer). *Nechayevism* - romantic glorification of conspiracy, ruthlessness, violence in the amoral tradition of Nechayev. *Bohemianism* - total irresponsibility; exclusive preoccupation with one's picturesque "life-style"; exhibitionism; rejection of any form of organisation or self-discipline. *Anti-Social Individualism* - the urge to "idealise the most anti-social forms of individual rebellion" (Fabbri).

"Intolerance of oppression [writes Malatesta], the desire to be free and to develop one's personality to its full limits, is not enough to make one an anarchist. That aspiration toward unlimited freedom, if not tempered by a love for mankind and by the desire that all should enjoy equal freedom, may well create rebels who... soon become exploiters and tyrants."³ Still other neo-anarchists are obsessed with "action for the sake of action." One of the foremost historians of Italian anarchism, Pier Carlo Masini, notes that for them "spontaneity" is the panacea that will automatical-

ly solve all problems. No theoretical or practical preparation is needed. In the “revolution” which is “just around the corner” the fundamental differences between libertarians and our mortal enemies, authoritarian groups like the “Marxist-Leninists” will miraculously vanish. Masini observes, “Paradoxically enough, the really modern anarchists are those with white hair, those who guided by the teachings of Bakunin and Malatesta, who in Italy and in Spain (as well as in Russia) had learned from bitter personal participation how serious a matter revolution can be.”⁴

It is not our intention to belittle the many fine things the scholars do say, nor to downgrade the magnificent struggles of our young rebels against war, racism and the false values of that vast crime “The Establishment” - struggles which sparked the revival of the long dormant radical movement. But they stress the negative aspects and ignore or misinterpret the constructive principles of anarchism. Bakunin and the classical anarchists always emphasised the necessity for constructive thinking and action: “it [1848 revolutionary movement] was rich in instincts and negative theoretical ideas which gave it full justification for its fight against privilege, but it lacked completely any positive and practical ideas which would have been needed to enable it to erect a new system upon the ruins of the old bourgeois setup.”⁵

Distorting Anarchist Ideas

Recent works on anarchism, like George Woodcock’s *Anarchism* and the two books by Horowitz and Joll, both titled *The Anarchists*, perpetuate the myth that the anarchists are living antiques, visionaries yearning to return to an idyllic past. According to Woodcock, “The historical anarchist movement that sprang from Bakunin and his followers is dead.” The cardinal principles of classical anarchism: economic and political decentralisation of power, individual and local autonomy, self-management of industry (“workers’ control”) and federalism are “obsolete forms of organisation [running counter] to the world wide trend toward political and economic centralisation.... The real social revolution of the modern age has in fact been this process of centralisation toward which every development of scientific and technological progress has contributed [the trend is in the opposite direction].... the anarchist movement failed to present an alternative to the state or the capitalist economy.”⁶

It is hard to understand how scholars even slightly acquainted with the vast libertarian literature on social reconstruction could possibly come to such absurd conclusion!! A notable exception is the French sociologist-historian Daniel Guerin whose excellent little book *L’anarchisme* has just been translated into English (available as “Anarchism: from Theory to Practice” from the ZB website (without the Chomsky intro.)) with an introduction by Noam Chomsky (Monthly Review Press, N. Y.) Guerin concentrates on the constructive aspects of anarchism. While not without its faults (he underestimates the importance of Kropotkin’s ideas and exaggerates Stirner’s) it is still the best short introduction to the subject. Guerin effectively refutes the arguments of recent historians, particularly Jean Maitron, Woodcock, and

on high by the State, but resulting from the harmonising by congresses and special assemblies from below.”¹⁷

“After the Revolution”

The anarchist thinkers were not so naive as to expect the installation of the perfect society composed of perfect individuals who would miraculously shed all their ingrained prejudices and old habits on the day after the revolution. They were primarily concerned with the immediate problems of social reconstruction that will have to be faced in any country - industrialised or not.

They are issues that no serious revolutionary has the right to ignore. It was for this reason that the anarchists tried to work out measures to meet the pressing problems most likely to emerge during what Malatesta called: “...the period of reorganisation and transition.”¹⁸ We summarise Malatesta’s discussion of some of the more important questions.¹⁹

Crucial problems cannot be avoided by postponing them to the distant future - perhaps a century or more - when anarchism will have been fully realised and the masses will have finally become convinced and dedicated anarchist-communists. We anarchists must have our own solutions if we are not to be relegated to the role of useless and impotent grumblers, while the more realistic and unscrupulous authoritarians seize power. Anarchy or no anarchy, the people must eat and be provided with the necessities of life. The cities must be provisioned and vital services cannot be disrupted. Even if poorly served, the people in their own interests would not allow us or anyone else to disrupt these services unless and until they are reorganised in a better way; and this cannot be achieved in a day.

The urbanisation of the anarchist-communist society on a large scale can only be achieved gradually as material conditions permit, and as the masses convince themselves of the benefits to be gained and as they gradually become psychologically accustomed to radical alterations in their way of life. Since free and voluntary communism (Malatesta’s synonym for anarchism) cannot be imposed, Malatesta stressed the necessity for the coexistence of various economic forms, collectivist, mutualist, individualist; on the condition that there will be no exploitation of others. Malatesta was confident that the convincing example of successful libertarian collectives will “attract others into the orbit of the collectivity... for my part I do not believe that there is ‘one’ solution to the social problem, but a thousand different and changing solutions, in the same way as social existence is different in time and space.”²⁰

“Pure” Anarchism is a Fiction

Aside from the “individualists” (a very ambiguous term) none of the anarchist thinkers were “pure” anarchists. The typical “pure” anarchist grouping, explains

unions for the organisation of workers in accordance with their different functions, gives a concrete conception of a society generated by a social revolution. There remained only to add to these two modes of organisation, a third, which we saw rapidly developing during the last fifty years... The thousands upon thousands of free combines and societies growing up everywhere for the satisfaction of all possible and imaginable needs, economic, sanitary, and educational; from mutual protection, for the propaganda of ideas, for art, for amusement, and so on. All of them covering each other, and all of them ready to meet new needs by new organisations and adjustments."¹⁵

One need not, in view of modern developments, agree with all of Kropotkin's specific suggestions to see that, in general, the concepts sketched out by him constitute a realistic basis for the reconstruction of society. Society is a vast interlocking network of co-operative labour: and all the deeply rooted institutions listed by Kropotkin, now functioning, will in some form continue to function for the simple reason that the very existence of mankind depends upon this inner cohesion. This has never been questioned by anyone. What is needed is emancipation from authoritarian institutions over society and authoritarianism within the organisations themselves: above all, they must be infused with revolutionary spirit and confidence in the creative capacities of the people. Kropotkin, in working out the sociology of anarchism, has opened an avenue of fruitful research that has been largely neglected by social scientists busily engaged in mapping out new areas for state control.

The anarchist's insistence on worker's control - the idea of self-management of industry by workers' associations "in accordance with their different functions" rests on very solid foundations. This tendency traces back to Robert Owen, the first International Workingmen's Association, the Guild Socialist movement in England and the pre-World War I syndicalist movements. With the Russian Revolution, the trend towards workers' control in the form of free soviets (councils) that arose spontaneously, was finally snuffed out with the Kronstadt massacre of 1921. The same tragic fate awaited the workers' councils in the Hungarian, Polish and East German risings around 1956. Among the many other attempts that were made, there is of course, the classic example of the Spanish Revolution of 1936, with the monumental constructive achievements in the libertarian rural collectives and workers' control of urban industry. The prediction of the *New Bulletin* of the reformist International Union of Food and Allied Workers Associations¹⁶ (July 1964) that: "The demand for workers' control may well become the common ground for advanced sectors in the labour movement both 'east' and 'west'" is now a fact.

Although the purged Bolshevik "left oppositionist," Victor Serge, refers to the economic crisis that gripped Russia during the early years of the revolution, his remarks are, in general still pertinent and incidentally illustrate Kropotkin's theme: "certain industries could have been revived (and) an enormous degree of recovery achieved by appealing to the initiative of groups of producers and consumers, freeing the state strangled co-operatives and inviting the various associations to takeover management of different branches of economic activity... I was arguing for a Communism of Associations - in contrast to Communism of the State - the total plan not dictated

Joll, concluding that their "image of anarchism is not true. Constructive anarchism which found its most accomplished expression in the writings of Bakunin, relies on organisation, on self-discipline, on integration, on a centralisation which is not coercive, but federalist. It relates to large-scale industry, to modern technology, to the modern proletariat, to genuine internationalism... In the modern world, the material, intellectual and moral interests have created between all parts of a nation and even different nations, a real and solid unity, and this unity will survive all states."¹⁷ To assess the extent to which classical anarchism is applicable to modern societies it is first necessary to summarise briefly its leading constructive tenets.

Complex Societies Necessitate Anarchism

It is a fallacy to assume that anarchists ignore the complexity of social life. On the contrary, the classical anarchists have always rejected the kind of "simplicity" which camouflages regimentation in favour of the natural complexity which reflects the many faceted richness and diversity of social and individual life. The Cybernetic mathematician John R. McEwan, writing on the relevance of anarchism to cybernetics explains that: "Libertarian socialists, [synonym for non-individualist anarchism] especially Kropotkin and Landauer, showed an early grasp of the complex structure of society as a complex network of changing relationships, involving many structures of correlated activity and mutual aid, independent of authoritarian coercion. It was against this background that they developed their theories of social organisation."¹⁸

Like his predecessors, Proudhon and Bakunin, Kropotkin elaborated the idea that the very complexity of social life demanded the decentralisation and self-management of industry by the workers. From his studies of economic life in England and Scotland he concluded that: "production and exchange represented an undertaking so complicated that no government [without establishing a cumbersome, inefficient bureaucratic dictatorship] would be able to organise production if the workers themselves, through their unions, did not do it in each branch of industry; for, in all production there arises daily thousands of difficulties that... no government can hope to foresee... Only the efforts of thousands of intelligences working on problems can co-operate in the development of the new social system and find solutions for the thousands of local needs."¹⁹

Decentralisation and autonomy does not mean the break-up of society into small, isolated, economically self-sufficient groups, which is neither possible nor desirable. The Spanish anarchist, Diego Abad De Santillan, Minister of the Economy in Catalonia in the early period of the Spanish Civil War, (December 1936) reminded some of his comrades: "Once and for all we must realise that we are no longer... in a little utopian world... we cannot realise our economic revolution in a local sense; for economy on a localist basis can only cause collective privation... economy is today a vast organism and all isolation must prove detrimental... We must work with a social criterion, considering the interests of the whole country and if possible the whole world."²⁰

A balance must be achieved between the suffocating tyranny of unbridled authority and the kind of "autonomy" that leads to petty local patriotism, separatism of little grouplets and the fragmentation of society. Libertarian organisation must reflect the complexity of social relationships and promote solidarity on the widest possible scale. It can be defined as federalism: co-ordination through free agreement, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. A vast co-ordinated network of voluntary alliances embracing the totality of social life, in which all the groups and associations reap the benefits of unity while still exercising autonomy within their own spheres and expanding the range of their freedom. Anarchist organisational principles are not separate entities. Autonomy is impossible without decentralisation, and decentralisation is impossible without federalism.

The increasing complexity of society is making anarchism *more* and *not less* relevant to modern life. It is precisely this complexity and diversity, above all their overriding concern for freedom and human values that led the anarchist thinkers to base their ideas on the principles of diffusion of power, self-management and federalism. The greatest attribute of the free society is that it is self-regulating and "bears within itself the seeds of its own regeneration" (Buber). The self-governing associations will be flexible enough to adjust their differences, correct and learn from their mistakes, experiment with new, creative forms of social living and thereby achieve genuine harmony on a higher, humanistic plane. Errors and conflicts confined to the limited jurisdiction of special purpose groups may do limited damage. But miscalculations and criminal decisions made by the state and other autocratically centralised organisations affecting whole nations, and even the whole world, can have the most disastrous consequences.

Modern Industry Better Organised Anarchistically

Bourgeois economists, sociologists, and administrators like Peter Drucker, Gunnar Myrdal, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Daniel Bell, now favour a large measure of decentralisation not because they have suddenly become anarchists, but primarily because technology has rendered anarchistic forms of organisation "operational necessities." The bourgeois reformers have yet to learn that as long as these organisational forms are tied to the state or to capitalism, which connotes the monopoly of political economic power, decentralisation and federalism will remain a fraud - a more efficient device to enlist the co-operation of the masses in their own enslavement. To illustrate wherein their ideas inadvertently demonstrate the practicality of anarchist organisation and how they contradict themselves, we cite the "free enterpriser" Drucker and the "welfare statist" Myrdal. In the chapter titled, "The Sickness of Government" Drucker writes:

Disenchantment with government cuts across national boundaries and ideological lines.... Government itself has become one of the vested interests.... The moment government undertakes anything it

becomes entrenched and permanent.... The unproductive becomes built into the political process itself.... Social theory, to be meaningful at all, must start with the reality of pluralism of institutions, a galaxy of suns rather than one big centre surrounded by moons that shine only by reflected light... a society of institutional diversity and diffusion of power.... In a pluralist society of organisations [each unit would be] limited to the specific service it renders to the members of society which it meant to perform - yet, since every institution has power in its own sphere, it would be as such, affected with the public interest.... Such a view of organisations as being autonomous and limited are necessary both to make the organisation perform and to safeguard the individual's freedom.¹¹

After demonstrating the "monstrosity of government, its lack of performance and its impotence" Drucker flatly contradicts himself and comes to the surprising conclusion that "never has strong, effective government been needed more than in this pluralist society of organisations..."

Myrdal convincingly demonstrates that both the Soviet and the "free world states" need decentralisation for administrative efficiency in order that (political and economic life) shall not succumb to the rigidity of the central apparatus. But then he expects the paternalistic welfare state to loosen "its controls over everyday life" and gradually transfer most of its powers to "all sorts of organisations and communities controlled by the people themselves..." No anarchist could refute Myrdal's argument better than he does himself: "to give up autocratic patterns, to give up administrative controls and... to withdraw willingly from intervening when it is no longer necessary, are steps which do not correspond to the inner workings of a functioning bureaucracy."¹² If these advocates of decentralisation and autonomy were consistent, they would realise that the diffusion of power leads to anarchism.

The anarchists have always opposed the Jacobins, Blanquists, Bolsheviks and other would-be dictators, who would in Proudhon's words: "reconstruct society upon an imaginary plan, much like the astronomers who for respect for their calculations would make over the system of the universe."¹³

The anarchist theoreticians limited themselves to suggest the utilisation of all the useful organisms in the old society in order to reconstruct the new. They envisioned the generalisation of practices and tendencies that are already in effect. The very fact that autonomy, decentralisation and federalism are more practical alternatives to centralism and statism already presupposes that these vast organisational networks now performing the functions of society are prepared to replace the old bankrupt hyper-centralised administrations. That the "elements of the new society are already developing in the collapsing bourgeois society" (Marx) is a fundamental principle shared by all tendencies in the socialist movement. Kropotkin was very explicit on this subject: "The anarchists... build their previsions of the future upon those data which are supplied by the observations of life at the present time..."¹⁴ The idea of independent communes for the territorial organisations and of federations of trade

Meaningful discussion about the relevance of anarchist ideas to modern industrialized societies must first, for the sake of clarity, outline the difference between today's "neo-anarchism" and the classical anarchism of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and their successors. The increasing complexity of society is making anarchism more and not less relevant to modern life. The aim of anarchism is to stimulate forces that propel society in a libertarian direction. It is only from this standpoint that the relevance of anarchism to modern life can be properly assessed. While Although anarchy has long been seen as an ideological system impossible to implement (if not inherently contradictory) and as a direct cause of numerous acts of terrorism throughout history, its ideas have still been influential. In fact, during the 20th century, anarchism, like communism, was seen as a new system of governance that could potentially replace capitalism and create a more utopian society. In the end, however, anarchism has failed to gain traction as a widespread movement in the modern world, even after the attempts made by the following 10 anarchist societies. 10 Revolutionary C