

Anarchism 101:

A beginner's guide to the most misunderstood political movement in history By Chris Dodge

"To be governed is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so."

—Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

There is an anarchist in all of us. Deep inside we yearn to be free from imposed constraints, to rebel against authority, to grow, and to live more fully. The corporate media would have us believe that "anarchism" is something menacing, chaotic—the work of people who wear black bandanas and throw bombs. But we know better.

Anarchism is a theory, practice, and movement of people who believe in self-regulation. As such, its historical roots are not only global but timeless, evoking the unfettered human spirit itself. In this loose sense, poets such as Walt Whitman are part of this tradition ("Unscrew the locks from the doors!"), as are children, nudists, and creators of puns.

Serious anarchist philosophy developed during the 19th century in the minds and writing of French journalist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Russian writer Mikhail Bakunin, Russian geographer Peter Kropotkin, and others. Sharing a distaste for government and coercion of all kinds, they disagreed on how to abolish it and live in its absence. A "fanatical lover of liberty," Bakunin advocated outright revolt and the formation of worker federations, while Kropotkin focused on promoting the ideals of altruism, solidarity, and mutual aid. Their works—and those of German philosopher Max Stirner and Italian agitator Errico Malatesta—helped form the basis for political organizing in both Europe and North America. Throughout Spain, self-identified anarchists collectivized farms and factories during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while in the United States the movement for the eight-hour workday was aided by anarchists who gave their life for the cause.

One of America's most prominent anarchists was Emma Goldman, a Jewish immigrant radical famed for her opposition to solemn political orthodoxy ("If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution" is an often quoted paraphrase of her views) as well as her lifelong commitment to justice. Her autobiography *Living My Life* offers a colorful portrait of anarchist activities of the era. Goldman criss-crossed the country on numerous lecture tours and, with Alexander Berkman, published the influential journal *Mother Earth* (1906–17) and important books by such writers as Michigan-born Voltairine de Cleyre. During World War I, however, new immigration laws excluded "anarchists, or persons who believe in or advocate the overthrow . . . of the Government of the United States," and she and Berkman were deported back to Russia in 1919. She grew disenchanted with the Soviet experiment, and emigrated to Toronto, where she died in 1940.

In the midst of the repressive political climate after World War I, Italian immigrant anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were arrested on dubious murder charges in 1920. Before they were both executed in 1927, Vanzetti wrote to a supporter, "I believe that a little more of voluntarism, and a little less of fatalism, in what concerns the human powers and possibilities, would be more salutary for all."

By then the words of the Declaration of Independence seemed forgotten: "When a long train of abuses and usurpations [imposes upon people] absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government." Yes, Thomas Jefferson was not only a revolutionary but a crypto-anarchist. "If it were left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government," he wrote, "I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

Despite efforts to root it out by both repression and ridicule, the anarchist impulse lives today, not only in a range of outspoken anti-authoritarian journals, tabloids, and zines, but also in the spirit of real volunteerism found among anarchist-influenced projects like alternative infoshops, the activist group Food Not Bombs, and free schools such as Summerhill in England. A new generation of young activists is now finding the courage to act as though the highest good is freedom rather than struggling to assert their ideas over others. People who

don't even call themselves anarchists keep the tradition alive by daring to believe that people, not coercive institutions, are best able to build a better world. infoshop.org crimethinc.com mumia.ipfox.com radio4all.net
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