

August 10, 1984

LIVING ANARCHISM!

INTRO

In reconsidering my anarchist ideas in light of the many changes that have occurred in society since I first became aware of anarchism, and the realities of today, I recognise that there are aspects of anarchism that remain as strong for me today as when I first became aware of them, if not even more powerful. The anarchist analysis of the role of the State, and the emphasis on mutual aid as a means of attaining a freer society for example. In addition, the thinking and writing of such men like Kropotkin, Randolph Bourne, and men of my own time like Colin Ward, Paul Goodman, Barteley DeLigt, Wilhelm Reich and Ghandi, still have enormous influence on my thinking.

Colin Ward continues to direct our thinking to the practical application of our ideas within the framework of our real existing society. Paul Goodman kept insisting that anarchism wasn't utopian in concept, but must be integrated into our lives as an ongoing process. Wilhelm Reich insisted on the necessity of affirming the importance of our sexuality and the negative effects of repression. Barteley DeLigt, the Dutch anarchist, continued to call for us to find means of non-violent direct action to further our anarchist vision. And of course Ghandi's marvelous

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inventiveness in inspiring the non violent direct actions that eventually drove the British Raj from India. All of these ideas are as important to me today as when I first discovered them, if not more so. These concepts and influences of course coupled with that vision of society as being self directed. A society of cooperating individuals, respecting each other, voluntarily practicing mutual aid to solve, peacefully, the complex problems we face. In short, the incredibly beautiful, simple and eminently practical model for society that we identify as Anarchist.

Because of the growth of statism, and the threat to human continuence that it poses, it is even more immediately necessary to create an awareness of our ideas. We must find means of enlisting the majority of peoples in the world to work together with us to bring about a more reasonable life directed society. We must encourage resistance to the growing, death directed statists.

Im convinced that in order to do this, we must begin by reexamining and re-evaluating some of our basic premises; especially in the area of tactics. A reexamination that must make us question our historical past, and also the role that anarchism plays in each of our lives. We must spare neither "The Forebearers of Anarchism", nor ourselves.

THINKING ABOUT THE PAST:

Of all the "myths" that survive from our past, the belief that existing institutions will be changed by means of a violent revolution has been perhaps one of the most harmful and growth arresting for our movement. This concept, rooted as it was in the optimism and revolutionary fervor of the nineteenth century; a conviction that the revolution was imminent; that the internal contradictions in capitalism portended its immediate downfall; and perhaps that most illusionary belief of all, that, the masses would create from the "ashes of old society", a shining, brilliant, libertarian future, now seems bitter and ^{sounds} hollow to our ears. Helas, the nineteenth century rallying cry, "To The Barricades", seems to have lead only to the establishment of even greater totalitarian societies.

When I was a young man, I think that the anarchistic concept that I found most attractive, was the idea, rooted in anarchist morality, "the means we employ must always be commensurate with the ends we would attain". If we accept this idea as contrasted with the marxist/capitalist adage, "The Ends Justify The Means", we must reexamine the concept of violent revolution, as a viable tactic for the achievement of anarchy.

Today, with our overview of history, and our awareness of the failures of all the revolutionary attempts that have been made; revolutions defeated from both the left and the right, we must conclude that in no case, has violence

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resulted in a more libertarian society. We must stop paying dues to the myth of violent overthrow of existing institutions and address ourselves to inventing non-violent, direct action tactics that will more directly reflect our overall view of how society can be organized.

In trying to understand, why anarchism hasn't flourished during the twentieth century, I have been led to consider that the centralizing of anarchist hopes around the concept of "The Revolution", a concept inherited from the nineteenth century, created a dichotomous condition in the lives of the anarchists who preceded us. Because of their preoccupation with "L'Idée", they were unable to turn their attention to the near relationships in their lives and thus, for the most part slipped into authoritarian family structures and sexist attitudes, that were divorced almost completely from the visions of anarchy they held. Not surprisingly this has led to almost a complete absence in the anarchist movement of the children of anarchists. There are a few exceptions of course, but these exceptions make even more poignant the absence of all the other children from anarchist families. Sadly, the miners and seamen, and garment workers that I met when I first came in contact with anarchism, didn't think a life of anarchist action and struggle, a life such as theirs, was good enough for their children. Like most other immigrants, they wanted

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their children to "succeed", to become the doctors, lawyers, college professors, professionals, and artists; which they for the most part did. At best, they became "liberals", who disappeared into the woodwork of existing institutions. Again, with only some few exceptions, most of the anarchists I met at that time were also sexist, as were most of the founders of our movement. Except in the case of a few radical women, women were not accorded an equal status in the anarchist groups. Just as in the rest of society, they were relegated to the roles of housewife and mother. I remember attending a meeting in California many years ago; a discussion of anarchist ideas, attended by a large number of anarchist families, and comrades. Audrey Goodfriend was one of only two women who stayed for the discussion. The rest took themselves off to the kitchen to prepare the repas that was to follow the meeting. When I sat myself at Audrey's feet, a stir went through some of the older comrades. My seating myself thus, caused a raising of eyebrows and snickers among them. None of them would have lowered themselves to sit at a woman's feet during a public discussion. It was beneath their dignity to do so. Don't get me wrong, these were good, committed comrades, who had suffered greatly for their devotion to anarchism. They had paid their dues in the mines and mills and continued to support their anarchist ideals despite their precarious positions as immigrants and foreigners. I loved them and respected them greatly, but wish they had

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been more able to recognize the dichotomy in their lives between the ideas that they held and the conduct of their relationships.

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I am convinced that the most pressing necessity we face as anarchists today is to invent directions and actions that will reflect the joyousness and hopefulness inherent in our anarchist ideas, rather than negativeness and despair. We must invent actions that are both beautiful and practical. Our critical evaluation of the role of the State must eventuate in response from people that will inflame their imaginations and open up new directions based on the realities of their lives.

Paul Goodman in his seminal article written in 1945, "Reflections On Drawing The Line", put it succinctly. "Free action is to live in the present society as though it were a natural society... the libertarian is rather a millenarian than a utopian. He does not look forward to a future state of things which he tries to bring about by suspect means; but he draws now, so far as he can on the natural force within that is no different in kind from what it will be in a free society, except that there, it will have more scope and be immeasurably reinforced by mutual aid and fraternal conflict. Merely by continuing to exist

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and act in nature and freedom, the libertarian wins the victory, establishes the society; it is not necessary for him to be the victor over anyone".

SOME THOUGHTS ON COMPROMISE:

We anarchists have always had our share of purists and puritains who were quick to point their accusing finger at us mere mortals who, *helas*, have had to compromise with, adapt to, the capitalist system in order to exist. Not all of us have been fortunate enough, or smart enough to discover how to exist without compromise. Possibly if one has opted not to raise children, or set up relationships with another person or persons, it would be possible to keep our compromises minimal. But, to live without compromise in this society, is to live in a vacuum.

For most of us compromise has been and continues to be a condition of our lives. I think that the issue here is not how to live without compromise, but rather how to intelligently set limits to the concessions that we must make.

For example, from my own life: I grew up in a poverty stricken slum in New York City. Early on, like most of the other kids in that jewish ghetto, I was aware of the fact that before me lay a life of unending labor. It was only after I developed political sensibilities that I was able to evolve a cogent approach to the necessity of selling my labor in the open market.

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Fortunately, I enjoyed working, and more fortunately I found work that afforded me great pleasure. The idea of enjoying work under capitalism may be heresy to some of our comrades, but, when Wilhelm Reich stated that; "Love, Work & Knowledge, are the wellsprings of human life, and should be addressed with passion and involvement...", I found myself in complete sympathy with him. I discovered that if one became really expert at ones work, it afforded you the luxury of great independence. The bosses need you, more then you need them. Too, I found that doing beautiful work was reward enough in its own right. It also helped to keep ones head straight. Then again, I found in my field, the rough construction trades, being a fine mechanic had the added benefit of earning you the respect of your fellow workers and made them more amenable to listening to your opinions on other matters. For example, during the Viet Nam war, when I rose to the floor of my local union and urged them to pass a resolution condemning the United States participation in the war; though most of the membership was ultra conservative and patriotic, and moved to attack me with cries of "kill the commie bastard", I was defended by a group of young work mates, who although they disagreed with my opinions, respected me and intervened to prevent me being beaten up. Later on I was gratified to find some of these young men participating in anti-Viet Nam War demos. True, by absolutist standards, I was compromising myself by making money for the companies I worked for. But, I

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soon learned to set definite limits to what kinds of work I would do. I lost jobs, because I refused to work on any building that had military or anti-human purpose. For example, I left a contractor I was working for when he insisted that I work on building a jail. But the reality of my life, feeling as I do that we are a long way from achievement of a free society; (certainly not in my life time) my commitment to raising children left me with no doubts about the necessity for working. This also caused me to temper this reality with choosing work that was socially useful and not anti-human. Compromise, we must, but if we keep in mind our humanist bias and our radical vision, we can keep compromise to a minimum.

SOME DIRECTIONS FOR THE HERE & NOW: LOOKING AHEAD:

In thinking about the future of Anarchism, I think that the most important direction for us, is to change our emphasis from that of a critical, negative attack on existing institutions, to positive experimentation with new directions and actions. Perhaps, not really new, for as the old adage says, "There Is Nothing New Under The Sun", but, renew our emphasis on directions that are humanistic, bold, experimental and offer a joyous, exciting restructuring for the world.

Because of the threat that the increased militarism in the world poses to all of us, joining together with all the others in the anti-militarist movements is of first importance. I recognize that many of the people in these movements are not anarchists, or even libertarians, but

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the very nature of the struggle against militarism, must be recognized as an attack against the state. Perhaps, the reason why those courageous and anarchistic women at Greenham Common, don't give recognition to their anarchistic nature, is because there weren't enough of us, anarchists, identified as such, struggling along side of them. To hell with the image of anarchists as cop fighters and quibblers over what kind of violence is acceptable and correct. Even though, that kind of action may relieve the frustrations and tensions created by our weakness, let us recognize and for all that violence is a politics of despair and build our reputations as fighters and activists, but non-violent fighters and activists. This would be a turn in a direction that I would consider creative anti-statism. And, also respect and a serious voice among those others struggling to turn the world's face away from military solutions.

Aware as we are of the needs for the multitudinous services that aren't available to the poorer peoples in the world; aware of the need to feed the famine struck, to provide the services for the aged, for the single women trying to raise their children in this hostile world, the inadequate health care facilities, the abysmal schooling of our children and that never ending array of ills that our society suffers from under the capitalist system: And also aware of the reality that begging the governments to address themselves to these needs will lead only to callous disregard or at best slothful dehumanized, bureaucratized solutions.

: We must join together

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with others who need these services and create means of satisfying them by acting directly and bypassing the bureaucratic governmental solutions. And in so doing give real meaning to our anarchist vision of mutual aid and cooperative experimentation. For example, 25 years ago, a group of us, anarchists and pacifists, all of whom had resisted WW2, some of whom were imprisoned for their resistance, banded together to start our own school. We all had young children, and none of us wanted to turn the responsibility of educating these young minds over to the state run school system. But, rather than carp and rail against the state school, we acted directly and started our alternative school, "Walden Center & School", which is still functioning with some of the original founders, still involved in the schools life. Besides the education of our children and to an increasing degree the children of our community, (we soon grew to a maximum of 90 children) Walden functioned as a core of resistance against the encroaching militarism of the state. Our school and parent body were in the forefront of the struggle against nuclear testing, and the resistance to the Viet Nam War. In fact, when the Viet Nam Day Committee was prohibited by the University of California from meeting on their Berkeley Campus, we opened Walden up for their use during the formative days and the movement grew rapidly from there. It was also through the involvement of some of us anarchists in the early days of the committee, that a drive to centralize and capture the movement by the various Berkeley Marxist groups was averted.

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By involving ourselves in groups that try to satisfy human need directly, voluntary groups such as coop schools, consumer coops, (not the monolithic beaurocratized super coops) and by experimenting with new living arrangements and working arrangements, and always resisting the encroachment of the state, Anarchism will thrive in the here and now. It will shrivel and die if it continues to be rooted in past dogma and tradition. Further more. I can say from own experience and the experiences of most of my comrades: Living Anarchism inflames and enlarges ones life and is a source of enrichment and joy.

DESPAIR NOT COMRADES, ANARCHISM IS NOW AND AHEAD; FOR THERE IS NO OTHER REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE:

-David Koven
AUGUST, 1984