

# **Majorities & Minorities, and other essays**

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## **MAJORITIES AND MINORITIES**

**We do not recognize the right of the majority to impose the law on the minority, even if the will of the majority in somewhat complicated issues could really be ascertained. The fact of having the majority on one's side does not in any way prove that one must be right. Indeed, humanity has always advanced through the initiative and efforts of individuals and minorities, whereas the majority, by its very nature, is slow, conservative, submissive to superior force and to established privileges.**

**But if we do not for one moment recognize the right of majorities to dominate minorities, we are even more opposed to domination of the majority by a minority. It would be absurd to maintain that one is right because one is in a minority. If at all times there have been advanced and enlightened minorities, so too have there been minorities which were backward and reactionary; if there are human beings who are exceptional, and ahead of their times, there are also psychopaths, and especially are there apathetic individuals who allow themselves to be unconsciously carried on the tide of events.**

**In any case it is not a question of being right or wrong; it is a question of freedom, freedom for all, freedom for each individual so long as he does not violate the equal freedom of others. No one can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is closer to the truth and which is the best road to the greatest good for each and everyone. Experience through freedom is the only means to arrive at the truth and the best solutions; and there is no freedom if there is not the freedom to be wrong.**

**In our opinion, therefore, it is necessary that majority and minority should succeed in living together peacefully and profitably by mutual agreement and compromise, by the intelligent recognition of the practical necessities of communal life and of the usefulness of concessions which circumstances make necessary.**

**As well as their reason and experience telling them that in spite of using all the alchemy of elections and parliament one always ends up by having laws which represent everything but the will of the majority, anarchists do not recognize that the majority as such, even if it were possible to establish beyond all doubt what it wanted, has the right to impose itself on the dissident minorities by the use of force.**

**Apart from these considerations, there always exists the fact that in a capitalist regime, in which society is divided into rich and poor, into employers and employees whose next meal depends on the absolute power of the boss, there cannot be really free elections.**

## **REFORMISM**

**The fundamental error of the reformists is that of dreaming of solidarity, a sincere collaboration, between masters and servants, between proprietors and workers which even if**

it might have existed here and there in periods of profound unconsciousness of the masses and of ingenuous faith in religion and rewards, is utterly impossible today.

Those who envisage a society of well stuffed pigs which waddle contentedly under the ferule of a small number of swineherd; who do not take into account the need for freedom and the sentiment of human dignity; who really believe in a God that orders, for his abstruse ends, the poor to be submissive and the rich to be good and charitable-can also imagine and aspire to a technical organisation of production which assures abundance to all and is at the same time materially advantageous both to the bosses and to the workers. But in reality " social peace" based on abundance for all will remain a dream, so long as society is divided into antagonistic classes, that is employers and employees. And there will be neither peace nor abundance.

The antagonism is spiritual rather than material. There will never be a sincere understanding between bosses and workers for the better exploitation of the forces of nature in the interests of mankind, because the bosses above all want to remain bosses and secure always more power at the expense of the workers, as well as by competition with other bosses, whereas the workers have had their fill of bosses and don't want more! '

[Our good friends] are wasting their time when they tell us that a little freedom is better than a brutal and unbridled tyranny; that a reasonable working day, a wage that allows people to live better than animals, and protection of women and children, are preferable to the exploitation of human labour to the point of human exhaustion; or that the State school, bad as it is, is always better, from the point of view of the child's moral development, than schools run by priests and monks . . . for we are in complete agreement. And we also agree that there may be circumstances in which the Election results, national or local, can have good or bad consequences and that this vote might be determined by the anarchists' votes if the strength of the rival parties were equally balanced.

In most cases it is an illusion; when elections are tolerably free, the only value they have is symbolic: they indicate the state of public opinion, which would have imposed itself by more efficacious means, and with more far reaching results, if it had not been offered the outlet of elections. But no matter; even if some minor advances were the direct result of an electoral victory, anarchists should not flock to the polling booths or cease to preach their methods of struggle.

Since no one can do everything in this world, one must choose one's own line of conduct.

There is always an element of contradiction between minor improvements, the satisfaction of immediate needs and the struggle for a society which is really better than the existing one. Those who want to devote themselves to the erection of public lavatories and drinking fountains where there is a need for them, or who use their energies for the construction of a road, or the establishment of a municipal school, or for the passing of some minor law to protect workers or to get rid of a brutal policeman, do well, perhaps, to use the\* ballot paper in favour of this or that influential personage. But then - since one wants to be "practical" one must go the whole hog - so, rather than wait for the victory of the opposition party, rather than vote for the more kindred party, it is worth taking a short cut and support the dominant party, and serve the government already in office, and become the agent of the Prefect or the Mayor. And in fact the neo-converts we have in mind did not in fact propose voting for the most " progressive " party, but for the one that had the greater chance of being elected . . . But in that case where does it all end? . . .

In the course of human history it is generally the case that the malcontents, the oppressed,

and the rebels, before being able to conceive and desire a radical change in the political and social institutions, restrict their demands to partial changes, to concessions by the rulers, and to improvements. Hopes of obtaining reforms as well as in their efficacy, precede the conviction that in order to destroy the power of a government or of a class, it is necessary to deny the reasons for that power, and therefore to make a revolution.

In the order of things, reforms are then introduced or they are not, and once introduced either consolidate the existing regime or undermine it; assist the advent of revolution or hamper it and benefit or harm progress in general, depending on their specific characteristic, the spirit in which they have been granted, and above all, the spirit in which they are asked for, claimed or seized by the people.

Governments and the privileged classes are naturally always guided by instincts of self preservation, of consolidation and the development of their powers and privileges; and when they consent to reforms it is either because they consider that they will serve their ends or because they do not feel strong enough to resist, and give in, fearing what might otherwise be a worse alternative.

The oppressed, either ask for and welcome improvements as a benefit graciously conceded, recognise the legitimacy of the power which is over them, and so do more harm than good by helping to slow down, or divert and perhaps even stop the processes of emancipation. Or instead they demand and impose improvements by their action, and welcome them as partial victories over the class enemy, using them as a spur to greater achievements, and thus they are a valid help and a preparation to the total overthrow of privilege, that is, for the revolution. A point is reached when the demands of the dominated class cannot be acceded to by the ruling class without compromising their power. Then the violent conflict inevitably occurs.

It is not true to say therefore, that revolutionaries are systematically opposed to improvements, to reforms. They oppose the reformists on the one hand because their methods are less effective for securing reforms from governments and employers, who only give in through fear, and on the other hand because very often the reforms they prefer are those which not only bring doubtful immediate benefits, but also serve to consolidate the existing regime and to give the workers a vested interest in its continued existence. Thus, for instance, State pensions, insurance schemes, as well as profit sharing schemes in agricultural and industrial enterprises, etc.

Apart from the unpleasantness of the word which has been abused and discredited by politicians, anarchism has always been, and can never be anything but, reformist. We prefer to say reformative in order to avoid any possible confusion with those who are officially classified as " reformists " and seek by means of small and often ephemeral improvements to make the present system more bearable (and as a result help to consolidate it); or who instead believe in good faith that it is possible to eliminate the existing social evils by recognising and respecting, in practice if not in theory, the basic political and economic institutions which are the cause of, as well as the prop that supports these evils. But in any case it is always a question of reforms, and the essential difference lies in the kind of reform one wants and the way one thinks of being able to achieve it. Revolution means, in the historical sense of the word, the radical reform of institutions, achieved rapidly by the violent insurrection of the people against existing power and privileges; and we are revolutionaries and insurrectionists because we do not just want to improve existing institutions but to destroy them completely, abolishing every form of domination by man over man, and every kind of parasitism on human labour; and because we want to achieve this as quickly as possible, and because we

**believe that institutions born of violence are maintained by violence and will not give way except to an equivalent violence. But the revolution cannot be made just when one likes. Should we remain inactive, waiting for the situation to mature with time?**

**And even after a successful insurrection, could we over night realise all our desires and pass from a governmental and capitalist hell to a libertarian-communist heaven which is the complete freedom of man within the wished for community of interests with all men?**

**These are illusions which can take root among authoritarians who look upon the masses as the raw material which those who have power can, by decrees, supported by bullets and handcuffs, mold to their will. But these illusions have not taken among anarchists. We need the people's consensus, and therefore we must persuade by means of propaganda and example, we must educate and seek to change the environment in such a way that this education may reach an ever increasing number of people....**

**We are reformers today in so far as we seek to create the most favourable conditions and as large a body of enlightened militants so that an insurrection by the people would be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. We shall be reformers tomorrow, after a triumphant insurrection, and the achievement of freedom, in that we will seek with all the means that freedom permits, that is by propaganda, example and even violent resistance against anyone who should wish to restrict our freedom in order to win over to our ideas an ever greater number of people.**

**But we will never recognise the institutions; we will take or win all possible reforms with the same spirit that one tears occupied territory from the enemy's grasp in order to go on advancing, and we will always remain enemies of every government, whether it be that of the monarchy today, or the republican or bolshevik governments of tomorrow.**

## **ORGANIZATION**

**ORGANISATION which is, after all, only the practice of co-operation and solidarity, is a natural and necessary condition of social life; it is an inescapable fact which forces itself on everybody, as much on human society in general as on any group of people who are working towards a common objective. Since man neither wishes to, nor can, live in isolation-indeed being unable to develop his personality, and satisfy his physical and moral needs outside society and without the co-operation of his fellow beings-it is inevitable that those people who have neither the means nor a sufficiently developed social conscience to permit them to associate freely with those of a like mind and with common interests, are subjected to organisation by others, generally constituted in a class or as a ruling group, with the aim of exploiting the labour of others for their personal advantage. And the age-long oppression of the masses by a small privileged group has always been the result of the inability of most workers to agree among themselves to organise with others for production, for enjoyment and for the possible needs of defence against whoever might wish to exploit and oppress them. Anarchism exists to remedy this state of affairs....**

**There are two factions among those who call themselves anarchists, with or without adjectives: supporters and opponents of organisation. If we cannot succeed in agreeing, let us, at least, try to understand each other.**

**And first of all let us be clear about the distinctions since the question is a triple one:**

**organisation in general as a principle and condition of social life today and in a future society; the organisation of the anarchist movement; and the organisation of the popular forces and especially of the working masses for resistance to government and capitalism....**

**The basic error committed by those opposed to organisation is in believing that organization is not possible without authority.**

**Now, it seems to us that organisation, that is to say, association for a specific purpose and with the structure and means required to attain it, is a necessary aspect of social life. A man in isolation cannot even live the life of a beast, for he is unable to obtain nourishment for himself except in tropical regions or when the population is exceptionally sparse; and he is, without exception, unable to rise much above the level of the animals. Having therefore to join with other humans, or more accurately, finding himself united to them as a consequence of the evolutionary antecedents of the species, he must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity; and the most extreme anti-organisers not only are subject to the general organisation of the society they live in, but also in the voluntary actions in their lives, and in their rebellion against organisation, they unite among themselves, they share out their tasks, they organize with whom they are in agreement, and use the means that society puts at their disposal. . .**

**Admitting as a possibility the existence of a community organised without authority, that is without compulsion-and anarchists must admit the possibility, or anarchy would have no meaning-let us pass on to discuss the organisation of the anarchist movement.**

**In this case too, organisation seems useful and necessary. If movement means the whole-individuals with a common objective which they exert themselves to attain-it is natural that they should agree among themselves, join forces, share out the tasks and take all those steps which they think will lead to the achievement of those objectives. To remain isolated, each individual acting or seeking to act on his own without co-ordination, without preparation, without joining his modest efforts to a strong group, means condemning oneself to impotence, wasting one's efforts in small ineffectual action, and to lose faith very soon in one's aims and possibly being reduced to complete inactivity....**

**A mathematician, a chemist, a psychologist or a sociologist may say they have no programme or are concerned only with establishing the truth. They seek knowledge, they are not seeking to do something. But anarchy and socialism are not sciences; they are proposals, projects, that anarchists and socialists seek to realise and which, therefore need to be formulated as definite programmes....**

**If it is true that [organisation creates leaders]; if it is true that anarchists are unable to come together and arrive at agreement without submitting themselves to an authority, this means that they are not yet very good anarchists, and before thinking of establishing anarchy in the world they must think of making themselves able to live anarchistically. The remedy does not lie in the abolition of organisation but in the growing consciousness of each individual member.... In small as well as large societies, apart from brute force, of which it cannot be a question for us, the origin and justification for authority lies in social disorganisation.**

**When a community has needs and its members do not know how to organise spontaneously to provide them, someone comes forward, an authority who satisfies those needs by utilising the services of all and directing them to his liking. If the roads are unsafe and the people do not know what measures to take, a police force emerges which in return for whatever services it**

renders expects to be supported and paid, as well as imposing itself and throwing its weight around; if some article is needed, and the community does not know how to arrange with the distant producers to supply it in exchange for goods produced locally, the merchant will appear who will profit by dealing with the needs of one section to sell and of the other to buy, and impose his own prices both on the producer and the consumer. This is what has happened in our midst; the less organised we have been the more prone are we to be imposed on by a few individuals. And this is understandable.

So much so that organisation, far from creating authority, is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each one of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders....

But an organisation, it is argued, presupposes an obligation to co-ordinate one's own activities with those of others; thus it violates liberty and fetters initiative. As we see it, what really takes away liberty and makes initiative impossible is the isolation which renders one powerless. Freedom is not an abstract right but the possibility of acting: this is true among ourselves as well as in society as a whole. And it is by co-operation with his fellows that man finds the means to express his activity and his power of initiatives

An anarchist organisation must, in my opinion [allow for] complete autonomy, and independence, and therefore full responsibility, to individuals and groups; free agreement between those who think it useful to come together for co-operative action, for common aims; a moral duty to fulfill one's pledges and to take no action which is contrary to the accepted programme. On such bases one then introduces practical forms and the suitable instruments to give real life to the organisation. Thus the groups, the federation of groups, the federations of federations, meetings, congresses, correspondence committees and so on. But this also must be done freely, in such a way as not to restrict the thought and the initiative of individual members, but only to give greater scope to the efforts which in isolation would be impossible or ineffective. Thus for an anarchist organisation congresses, in spite of all the disadvantages from which they suffer as representative bodies . . . are free from authoritarianism in any shape or form because they do not legislate and do not impose their deliberations on others. They serve to maintain and increase personal contacts among the most active comrades, to summarise and encourage programmatic studies on the ways and means for action; to acquaint everybody with the situation in the regions and the kind of action most urgently needed; to summarise the various currents of anarchist opinions at the time and to prepare some kind of statistics therefrom. And their decisions are not binding but simply suggestions, advice and proposals to submit to all concerned, and they do not become binding and executive except for those who accept them and for as long as they accept them. The administrative organs they nominate - Correspondence Commissions, etc.-have no directive powers, do not take initiatives except for those who specifically solicit and approve of them, and have no authority to impose their own views, which they can certainly hold and propagate as groups of comrades, but which cannot be presented as the official views of the organisation. They publish the resolutions of the congresses and the opinions and proposals communicated to them by groups and individuals; and they act for those who want to make use of them, to facilitate relations between groups, and co-operation between those who are in agreement on various initiatives; each is free to correspond with whoever he likes direct, or to make use of other committees nominated by specific groupings

In an anarchist organisation individual members can express any opinion and use every tactic which is not in contradiction with the accepted principles and does not interfere with the activities of others. In every case a particular organisation lasts so long as the reasons for union are superior to those for dissension: otherwise it disbands and makes way for other,

more homogenous groupings.

Certainly the life and permanence of an organisation is a condition for success in the long struggle before us, and besides, it is natural that every institution should by instinct aim at lasting indefinitely. But the duration of a libertarian organisation must be the result of the spiritual affinity of its members and of the adaptability of its constitution to the continually changing circumstances. When it can no longer serve a useful purpose it is better that it should die.

We would certainly be happy if we could all get along well together and unite all the forces of anarchism in a strong movement; but we do not believe in the solidity of organisations which are built up on concessions and assumptions and in which there is no real agreement and sympathy between members.

Better disunited than badly united. But we would wish that each individual joined his friends and that there should be no isolated forces, or lost forces.

It remains for us to speak of the organisation of the working masses for resistance against both the government and the employers.

. . . Workers will never be able to emancipate themselves so long as they do not find in union the moral, economic and physical strength that is needed to subdue the organised might of the oppressors.

There have been anarchists, and there are still some, who while recognising the need to organise today for propaganda and action, are hostile to all organisations which do not have anarchism as their goal or which do not follow anarchist methods of struggle.... To those comrades it seemed that all organised forces for an objective less than radically revolutionary, were forces that the revolution was being deprived of. It seems to us instead, and experience has surely already confirmed our view, that their approach would condemn the anarchist movement to a state of perpetual sterility. To make propaganda we must be amongst the people, and it is in the workers' associations that workers find their comrades and especially those who are most disposed to understand and accept our ideas. But even when it were possible to do as much propaganda as we wished outside the associations, this could not have a noticeable effect on the working masses. Apart from a small number of individuals more educated and capable of abstract thought and theoretical enthusiasms, the worker cannot arrive at anarchism in one leap. To become a convinced anarchist, and not in name only, he must begin to feel the solidarity that joins him to his comrades, and to learn to cooperate with others in the defence of common interests and that, by struggling against the bosses and against the government which supports them, should realise that bosses and governments are useless parasites and that the workers could manage the domestic economy by their own efforts. And when the worker has understood this, he is an anarchist even if he does not call himself such.

Furthermore, to encourage popular organisations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas, and should therefore be an integral part of our programme.

An authoritarian party, which aims at capturing power to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining an amorphous mass, unable to act for themselves and therefore always easily dominated. And it follows, logically, that it cannot desire more than that much organisation, and of the kind it needs to attain power: Electoral organisations if it hopes to achieve it by legal means; Military organisation if it relies on violent action.

**But we anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves. We do not believe in the good that comes from above and imposed by force; we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance. It matters to us therefore that all interests and opinions should find their expression in a conscious organisation and should influence communal life in proportion to their importance.**

**We have undertaken the task of struggling against existing social organisation, and of overcoming the obstacles to the advent of a new society in which freedom and well being would be assured to everybody. To achieve this objective we organise ourselves in a party and seek to become as numerous and as strong as possible. But if it were only our party that was organised; if the workers were to remain isolated like so many units unconcerned about each other and only linked by the common chain; if we ourselves besides being organised as anarchists in a party, were not as workers organised with other workers, we could achieve nothing at all, or at most, we might be able to impose ourselves . . . and then it would not be the triumph of anarchy but our triumph. We could then go on calling ourselves anarchists, but in reality we should simply be rulers, and as impotent as all rulers are where the general good is concerned.'**