

The Mission of Anarchism in the Modern World

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It is not a new idea that today the great projects of rebuilding the world are in decline. In the twentieth century, mighty movements mobilized millions of people to storm the heavens, politically speaking, and carry out “great constructions” [in the sense of Soviet-era projects aimed at reinventing society]. But over the course of the last century, one after another, they went bankrupt both ethically and practically and soon lost relevance. Here, first of all, fascism and communism of the Leninist variety come to mind. Even the seemingly triumphant liberal project, in fact, simply dissolved into the global capitalist system and geopolitical game, in which the mechanics are hardly liberal.

Of the ambitious ideocrats who dare to rebuild the world in accordance with their convictions, perhaps the voice of the jihadists is the only one that rings out loudly today. Yet Islamic fundamentalism is obviously not the sort of project that a person with an anarchist worldview can get behind.

Ill-fated global plans at the end of the twentieth century gave rise to deep pessimism and paralysis in regards to the idea of transformation. However, the first decades of the new century have clearly shown that the “end of history” is cancelled. Growing instability, rebelliousness, and ungovernability have manifested themselves. The number of anti-government demonstrations under a variety of slogans and flags has increased by several orders of magnitude compared to the previous era.

At the same time, there is an acute need for fundamental change on the widest possible territorial scale. We still need a new world, just as we did before. Almost everything that exists in society is unacceptable and cannot serve as a framework for the present or the future.

But what will the transformed reality be like? There are unpromising prophecies of a “brave new world” ruled entirely by elites of post-humanity, or, conversely, of a new feudalism and a great schism accompanied by a surge of brutal cruelty. These pictures are accompanied by the prospect of a global ecological catastrophe. But in parallel with these varieties of gloom, a different trend is becoming more and more apparent: the desire for direct democracy, for egalitarian collectivity, for the eradication of inequality and oppression, for a harmonious coexistence with nature. This trend is still “sprinkled” across many different social currents, which have not yet formed into a united stream. Nevertheless, it brings the relevance of anarchism back to life.

At a time when all other missionaries have shown themselves to be deceivers or maniacs, the time has come for anarchists to remember their mission and reassert their global project. What might its common features be?

Dismantle the Megamachine

Modern mass society is crowded into gigantic urban agglomerations. The lion's share of human life is controlled and directed by the laws of states, as well as by capitalist relations in the sphere of production, exchange, and consumption. As a result, modern man finds himself in the position of an object manipulated by gigantic machine-like forces. At the same time, we are immersed in constant turmoil. The modern world is characterized by

the sleep of reason and the suppression of deep feelings, replaced by momentary, externally controlled desires. This state is repugnant to human nature; it causes dissatisfaction, followed by a longing for something different.

But the monstrous scale of the state fills us with fear and doubt: could we ever get out from under its iron heel? The endless buying and selling that fills our daily lives along a million different vectors aggravates our dependence and, even worse, corrupts and twists us as if from within.

Yet the very course of life pushes a person to rebel—and a wealth of historical evidence shows that even the most seemingly omnipotent social systems eventually collapse like a house of cards, sometimes quite unexpectedly. These are the starting points of our struggle against the prevailing order. To crush and dismantle the megamachine is the ambitious task before the anarchist movement.

New Community

Today we see a progressive atomization and weakening of collective ties. Neighbors know less and less about each other, and sometimes they completely avoid each other. Noisy family gatherings are becoming rarer and more forced.

The causes of this are complex and it is not easy to single out the main ones. There is the growing sphere of individual entertainment, the general trend towards individual comfort, which is always threatened by “excessive” intimacy, and the notorious egoism, organic to capitalist market society, which transforms any relationship into a temporary interaction between two consumers for mutual benefit. The word “partner” is becoming more and more conventional; in Russian, it suggests alienation, functioning as a kind of antonym to terms like beloved, friend, comrade...

We consider the crisis of collectivity, of the joint existence of people, to be one of the most catastrophic consequences of capitalism and state power. In addition to moralizing of a purely ethical nature, the anarchist revolution also has concrete institutional instruments for creating what we might call a “new communality.” These include popular assemblies, gatherings, collective self-governing bodies, and economic entities. When the parasite of the system, which has penetrated deep into the social fabric and separated us from each other, is ripped away from the body of society, we will be faced with the **necessity** to restore warm horizontal bonds and connect together in bonds of solidarity.

The collective creation of social life will stand in stark contrast to contemporary social practices. Just look at the current initiative of the Russian authorities to organize voting by mail—now even the imitation of choice will not draw together a crowd of strangers at the ballot box.

Yes, we plan to get together to make decisions, to prepare food in crowded and noisy kitchens instead of receiving it in sterile delivery bags, to introduce our children to their peers on the street instead of just sitting them down to watch a cartoon alone... The degradation of humanity that is unfolding before our eyes can stop. It must be stopped.

The Economy

Managing people for the purpose of personal gain, perceiving everything in the world—both living and inanimate—as raw material with which to make a profit, the pathological luxury of a tiny minority at the expense of the deprivation of the vast majority: these are just a few of the most striking illustrations that characterize the modern economic model. Its essence is diametrically opposed to what we consider just and right. All the reasons to reject capitalism can be boiled down to two main theses:

1. This economic system is unethical, unjust, and degrading
2. It fails to provide a decent standard of living for all.

Cash and commodity relations, wage labor, investments, bank loans, and interest rates are so deeply rooted in our everyday life that sometimes it seems as if it would be impossible to get rid of them—as if without them, there would be immediate famine and decline.

But we do have something to oppose to them: it is the human labor force (many thousands of people today waste their labor on useless work, doing what are called “shit jobs”); it is the labor experience of workers, which will enable them to maintain a boss-free economy; it is technology, which will enable society to regulate its production and distribution system according to its needs and values... This should be enough to transfer the economy from the hands of the elite to the control of society as a whole, to ensure the equitable management of production by laboring people and realize the principle “From each according to ability, to each according to need.”

The mission of the anarchist movement is to root in society, by word, deed and example, an understanding of the principles of economic justice and, having overthrown the state and the capitalists, to “clear a space”—to create the social and political conditions for its realization.

The Elimination of Discrimination

Modern society is filled with discrimination on a variety of grounds. People experience discrimination on the basis of a wide range of attributes and characteristics. The reasons for this include prejudice, whether centuries-old or new; the principle of collective responsibility; and the way that people are alienated from each other in a world permeated by capitalist relations.

Prejudice and collective responsibility are skillfully manipulated by unscrupulous politicians.

Gender oppression is one of the oldest and most harmful forms of discrimination. Although in Eastern Europe, as well as the “Western World,” the situation has changed significantly compared to the openly patriarchal past, women remain oppressed. This is confirmed by data regarding domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence and by the difference in average incomes. Practices and patterns of behavior that denigrate woman retain their force.

Take, for example, the attitude that “Politics is not a woman’s business.” There are many such invisible cultural obstacles in our social reality that obstruct women from exploring their full potential.

And there is another detail that often goes unnoticed, although it is one of the most important. Relationships between all people in general are poisoned by gender stereotypes and the mutual consumer attitude and selfishness rooted in them. Because of this, even the most seemingly intimate connections cause people pain and unhappiness. The capitalist and authoritarian worldview prevents true intimacy from emerging.

The mission of anarchism is to achieve genuine sisterhood/fraternity between people over and above any group identity. We have a variety of tools at our disposal to pursue this:

1. the collaborative practice of building and managing society, which requires equal cooperation and mutual warmth among all participants in the process
2. a revolutionary political culture, which requires the conscious active involvement of representatives of all oppressed groups in social effort together
3. finally, a program of education and developing literacy, which helps people to leave prejudice behind.

Thus, the ambition of the anarchist project is, in eliminating discrimination, to improve interpersonal relations and, however naïve this may sound, to bring the love of the neighbor back into our lives. Capitalism and authoritarianism stand in the way of this, but they are not insurmountable obstacles.

Resolving National Conflicts

Since time immemorial, human society has been shaken and terrorized by violent confrontations motivated by ethnic or national cultural differences. Additional criteria have been invented and added alongside those, including religious and racial differences. Inter-national and inter-ethnic conflicts reached a new intensity in the era of nation-states, which remain the chief form of political organization to this day. With their emergence, the question of which nation has legitimate right to rule a particular state began to be raised with extreme urgency. Which land “rightfully belongs” to which national group? The result has been the immeasurable suffering of millions of innocent people: forced assimilation, mass deportations and, finally, brutal acts of mass murder. Yet after all this, national conflicts still flare up all over the world.

Hardly any other imaginary contradictions in the history of mankind have had as horrific consequences as ethnic conflict. National conflicts are often based on the interests of national political and economic elites and state bureaucracies, as well as the most ignorant prejudices and distorted ideas about their own neighbors—the Other, representatives of other national groups.

At the root of the idea of national conflict lies the question, “Us or them?” Anarchism offers an alternative: “Both we and they, together and as equals.” By rejecting the nation-state, which is nothing more than an instrument of oppression and injustice, anarchists open the way to confederation: the equal cooperation of peoples in all territories. The same land can be both Serbian and Albanian, Armenian and Azerbaijani... the list is endless. Equality and self-government, the social pillars of anarchism, are the indispensable conditions for fruitful and mutually beneficial dialogue between cultures. The need for this dialogue has not diminished—on the contrary, it has intensified in the twenty-first century.

Reharmonization with Nature

It has long been a commonplace that capitalism in particular and the ever-expanding economy and consumption in general have an extremely destructive effect on nature. Likewise the understanding that this vector of development threatens to destroy humanity and the planet we call home.

We would like to take a deeper look at the problem. The anthropocentric worldview that dominates today and the way of life conditioned by it is a particular case of a hierarchical attitude to the world and toward being as a whole. Nature is “the workshop of Man”... This view is not natural, ethical, or acceptable. The true emancipation of humanity cannot take place unless we overcome our alienation from nature and finding harmony with it.

What ecological measures can anarchism offer? Modern technology should be reoriented from maximizing profit to conserving and restoring nature, as well as providing decent material living conditions for all. Ideally, we should put an end to the extensive expansion of human destructive influence on nature. The knowledge and capabilities humanity has accumulated should make it possible to fulfill this task, or at least to advance toward its fulfillment.

It is of utmost importance to reorganize living space, getting rid of the monstrous megalopolis as a form of human dwelling. The settlement must be proportionate to the person, no matter how subjective this may sound. The lifeless anthropogenic landscape, which cuts people off from natural processes, must give way to the harmonious inclusion of the settlement in the natural landscape, the intertwining of the natural and the human.

Here and Now

The intolerable state of our present situation... and the outlines of a renewed world, like prophetic dreams, stir our minds and hearts. These are the points of mobilization that keep us from giving up and accepting. That is why we are ready to make efforts, to take risks, to make sacrifices in order to create a new society. An organized revolutionary struggle is the path by which we will reach the goal outlined in this text. Victory is possible—and therefore, we must win.

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