

The Need for a Revolutionary Anarchist Movement Has Never Been Greater

Wayne Price

Anarchism is everywhere in the media recently. Anarchists are blamed and denounced by a wide spectrum of politicians. Trump and his followers denounce anarchists and antifa as being the central figures in the Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

Democrats make a distinction between those they designate as peaceful protesters and bad, violent anarchists who, echoing the Republicans, they charge are responsible for property damage and engage in looting.

In reality, anarchists are involved in a wide range of activities within the protest movement. Ideas are circulating within the rebellions which, if not anarchist, are consistent with anarchism. The idea of people directly taking to the streets as opposed to waiting every few years to vote for a politician to go to a faraway place to make decisions for us is congruent with anarchism. The demands of the BLM movement including those calling to defund the police and even abolish them are distinct from calling for the usual reforms of more sensitivity training for cops.

It is unlikely these forces will result in a popular anarchist revolution in the near future, but will these factors contribute to creating an organized revolutionary anarchist movement? Organized does not mean any type of party, an organization that aims to take state power and rule over the people. Anarchists do not tell people what to do. They are in dialogue with others, contributing their own ideas openly and honestly, encouraging others to independently self-organize and oppose authoritarian approaches.

U.S. politics are highly polarized. The Republican Party, once a center-right party, has become a far-right cult. It shades into self-identified Nazis as well as Q-anon fascist crackpots. The Democrats have followed along on the slide to the right, now becoming the center-right party. But the Democrats have had to react to the upsurge on the left by developing a so-called progressive wing, however powerless.

The Democrats dare not go as far to their left as the Republicans can go to the right. The Republican base can get hysterically crazed, oozing over into fascism, without threatening the foundations of the system. But if the Democratic base of African-Americans, Latinx, unionized workers, women, environmentalists, LGBT people, and others got too militant, it would shake the ruling order.

Their needs could not be satisfied without deep inroads into capitalism and the state. Angry workers might even hold mass strikes and shut down the economy, even occupy workplaces and industries and start them up on their own. The ruling elite of which the Democratic Party is a component part, will not allow this.

Therefore, it is extremely important for them to discredit anarchists. Massive efforts have been made to channel discontent into the electoral system, specifically by the Democrats. An indication of the turn towards the left has been the increased support for what is called socialism by its advocates, but are just extended government programs such as those found in Scandinavian countries.

This enthusiasm, especially by young people (whatever socialism means to them) was exhibited in the recent Democratic presidential primaries, initially directed into support for Bernie Sanders' campaign. Even after he withdrew from the race, the Democratic Socialists of America mostly focused on electoralism while Bernie threw his full support behind the Democratic electoral ticket.

However, some former Bernie supporters have become disillusioned with the Democrats and have turned in an anti-electoral, almost anarchist direction.

Contrary to the media's image of anarchists as a scary monolith, there are differences among themselves on many topics. About violence, for example, many anarchists are absolute pacifists while others will use physical force in self-defense, but almost all of those distinguish between destruction of property and attacks against people. Many believe in a long-term strategy of building alternate institutions until they can, hopefully, replace the capitalist economy and state. Others, without rejecting alternate institutions, believe that there will have to be a direct confrontation with the state and the capitalist class at some point in the form of a revolutionary insurrection. Both tendencies (which overlap) support the popular BLM protests.

In demonstrations and organizing for them, anarchists often work as medics, food providers, legal aides, and in other supportive roles, as well as being in the front lines against the police. The BLM demonstrations revealed a wide layer of anarchists who are Black or otherwise people of color. They integrate anarchist concepts with anti-racist theory and their own experiences.

The establishment tries to undermine the trend to anarchism every way it can. As mentioned, there is the blame-the-anarchists tendency by both the right and the liberals. The provocative use of violence by fascist groups and cops in creating some of the violence and property damage is generally ignored.

Defund the police, while causing cries of horror from the right is no more than shifting government money around to different agencies while reorganizing the cops to continue policing the poor and repressing resistance. Even the most radical demand to abolish the police, is merely liberal if interpreted to mean eliminating a specialized police force while maintaining capitalism and the state.

It is an illusion to say that the police can be abolished without a revolution to create a different kind of society. Indeed, it is a popular misconception to believe that anarchists want a society just like the present one, but without cops. Class society is a self-justification for maintaining the armed might of the state. Leaving capitalism in place without current police structures would result in chaos (anarchy, as the media would have it) until order was reestablished by criminal gangs, mobsters, corporate private police, or a combination of all three. Most people, no matter how much they hate the police, know this. Anarchists can support demands for defunding or abolition of the police, or other reforms such as ending drug laws, while explaining this can only be fully achieved after a revolution.

There is enormous pressure to push our movement to moderate our maximalist demands. This is occurring as the world faces a concentration of disasters making mild solutions completely inadequate: the pandemic, the depression it has triggered, racism and police oppression, climate catastrophe with its resulting heatwaves, raging storms, and wildfires, and the vile Trump presidency, continuing wars, increased U.S.-China tensions, and a new nuclear arms race, all of which beg for visions that go beyond reforms.

Under these conditions, nothing could be more important than the growth and coherence of revolutionary anarchism. How this could shake out is unknown. North America is a big place and it is unlikely that one organization, network, or federation could or will have all the best ideas.

A revolution, if it ever comes, will be a united front of many tendencies, anarchist and non-anarchist. It is important, however, that the minority that sees itself as anarchist not passively wait for movements to appear, but work to move the process forward.

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