

Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices
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Lecture 17 Anarchism Lec 1/4 28:32
Historical Background Global Appeal, Recent Revival, Catalonia, Occupy

Well, hello everyone, and we're going to start our fifth topic, that is, Anarchism - our fifth topic in this NPTEL ideologies course 2019-20. Our topic is Anarchism. Now there's a popular perception that an anarchist is someone who goes around furtively hiding and throwing bombs at institutions or people or into crowds of people - well in fact that form of anarchism is very, very rare. And anarchism itself is a substantial body of political philosophy in its own right, a substantial ideology in its own right.

Well, much of anarchism starts from a similar place to Marx. Marx shows that capitalist or commodity producing systems are very powerful and very constricting - they actually shape human nature or restrict human nature to their own ends. Commodity production - capitalism - both shapes and restricts and constricts human nature until its only expression or only permitted expressions serves its ends, serves the ends of capitalist or commodity production.

But Marx leaves open the possibility that we can create better systems. If markets are human creations, we can do something about them. And Marx's intended work on the state, which he never got around to writing - he died before he could - Marx's intended work on the state may well have addressed some of the relevant issues.

He died before he could complete that work, but he clearly intended it. And other theorists - liberal theorists for their part - never hesitated to expound there are accounts of the state. Even if they often disagree, as we have seen there are different forms of liberalism, liberals may disagree with one on one another over the state.

But anarchists take a very different position; in sharp contrast to both Marx and liberals, anarchists express far greater suspicion about all forms of the state and about other forms of authority both political and religious. And they do that even if many of them criticize capitalism in terms very similar to Marx's own terms.

Indeed anarchists were significant participants in 19th century socialist movements; the International Workingmen's Association, also called the First International, was created when Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's followers joined forces with Marx's followers in 1864, even though - well their disagreements between Marx's & Prudhon caused the organization to collapse in 1871.

But since then anarchists have at times gained quite substantial political support- for example, among landless peasants in Russia shortly before the 1917 in Bolshevik Revolution - and they have had a strong influence. They have left, anarchists have left a strong influence on the thinking and organization of trade unions in France, in Italy and in Spain as well as in Argentina, Uruguay, and , and that influence has persisted despite decades of fascism in Spain and brutal military régimes in Latin America and Central America.

More recently, anarchist ideas have found fresh expression in the Occupy movements in the United States and less obviously in the United Kingdom in the wake of the 2017 financial crash. Such movements, among other things, have focused on something we have already noted: the failure of social democratic parties like the Democrats in the US or Labour in the UK to oppose the policies which caused the crash

Now, we need a short update there. The Labour Party is currently - this is 2019 - showing the beginnings of a potentially very strong willingness to restore the social-democratic state, at the very least to revive it to re-strengthen it, and possibly to renationalize, to re-socialize substantial areas of the British economy.

But anarchist movements the modern anarchist, the up to date or contemporary anarchist movements, have also pointed out the way, for example, state bailouts for the failed banks, the banks which crashed in 2007 and so on - how these failed bailouts helps the banks to consolidate their hold on land and property - because they simply took over houses and other property on which people could no longer pay their mortgages. We might even see it as a land grab, see that process as a land grab.

The failed banks themselves had huge influence on policy and legislation. For example, the crash put millions out of work and those with mortgages often had their homes repossessed by the banks which had lent them money in the first place. Secondly, when the Obama administration, the first Obama administration in the United States, passed what was apparently new legislation on the financial sector, the financiers in Wall Street went out into the street and

opened bottles of champagne to celebrate because they had nothing to be afraid of from the new legislation.

Anarchists, anarchism's central concern over episodes like this is like Marxist concern, anarchism's concern is that such episodes are not episodic but they're systematic. According to anarchist' thinkers, established power invariably expands far beyond the limits apparently placed upon it and far beyond what the public would tolerate if they knew about it.

Anarchist critics often site a very impressive body of evidence for this. In earlier times the French Revolution soon collapsed in a reign of terror. The Russian Revolution in 1917 had similar results - it resulted in a state which by the time it collapsed in 1991 had almost no public assent whatever. More recently global scandals have emerged over the extent of E-electronic surveillance by the US government including illegal surveillance of its own citizens - and hacking the phones used by heads of government even in friendly states. That process relied upon willing cooperation by major IT corporations.

In India, highly repressive colonial legislation has never been repealed or has been repealed, reintroduced, and vigorously used despite severe criticism and damage to the possibility of peaceful dispute resolution. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958, which has even been used with retrospective effect, is an obvious example.

Noam Chomsky is perhaps the most famous anarchist thinker today, and he has spent many decades detailing abuses of power by the United States government and its allies. What this indicates is that anarchism retains a profound suspicion of established power of all kinds.

This suspicion extends to religious authority here again, the evidence is very substantial. The Roman Catholic Church has publicly admitted covering up several scandals of child abuse including substantial amounts of child sex abuse by priests. And in addition sharp criticisms have been made of concubinage in Hindu caste society as a religiously sanctioned abuse of economic power and social status. I draw that from Hira Singh's book published in 2014; it's called *Recasting Caste*.

Now it's perhaps not surprising that anarchism has had considerable influence in certain countries and regions which have historically had strong religious traditions; these include France and Spain, and almost all of Latin America. The anarchist critique of religion, however, applies to all religions because of their claim to spiritual authority, which in many cases is

unquestionable. A great strength of the anarchist analysis of religion is that religion works hand-in-hand with political and financial power

Now, the anarchist critique of the religious claim to authority is further strengthened by the fact that religions impose standards of good and evil or acceptable and unacceptable conduct. Those standards are enforced and policed by priests, imams, rabbis and any number of other religious authorities in any number of faiths.

According to anarchists, those standards amount to an enormous number of controls on humanity, even to the extent that thinking certain kinds of thoughts becomes a moral crime, a sin. Well we shouldn't be surprised that anarchism has had global appeal but this has been strengthened by the extent of oppression, suffering, and abusive of power material and spiritual, all over the world. We should not be surprised that anarchist tendencies are found all over the world.

Anarchist thinkers have influenced political movements in India, China, Japan, Korea and parts of Africa, not least during the struggles for liberation from colonial domination. In the period immediately after the Russian revolution, anarchist were so popular that the Bolshevik party almost regard them as rivals.

And where the state has collapse, which it has done many times in terrible civil wars - many of those result from global drives for natural resources - well, in such conditions are returned to self-generated local community-based organization dispute resolution may well offer fresh hope.

Anarchist thinking is also found in records from earlier times, ideas which we would today call anarchist occurred in ancient slave rebellions and they figured in the thinking of diggers, a group called Diggers in the English Revolutions in the 1640s. Anarchist thinking also appeared in the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1848, and the Paris commune of 1871 had an anarchist element; one of the most successful anarchist movements was the one led by Emiliano Zapata in Mexico in 1911. Although Zapata himself was ambushed and killed in 1919 and his mentor Ricardo Flores Magón was imprisoned in the US and murdered in prison, the Zapatista legacy survives in the form of EZLN - The Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

In Brazil, a contemporary Anarchist movement is the MST the movement for rural workers. Both aim to regain control of land from large cattle-ranching oligarchies which have dispossessed peasants of communal lands. I should add that today the current Brazilian government under Jair, President Jair Bolsonaro has done a great deal to make the task of regaining control of

land from ownership oligarchies very much more difficult. You'll be aware of the international coverage of this matter.

Well, anarchism has had a kind of global appeal despite frequent allegations that it is optimistic and even utopian about human nature. And what is its optimistic view? It is that societies must be founded on and informed by mutual respect, compassion and cooperation. This has even been called a mystical streak in anarchism, a belief in I - quote - 'almost unlimited possibilities of self-development'. And that has the further implication that all human beings can create a harmonious society and lead harmonious lives.

I take that from Anthony Heywood's **[Andrew Heywood's]** commentary on anarchism 2000 or 2007, but leading an anarchist life can take enormous moral and physical courage. Gandhi may well be the outstanding modern example of that. He was partly influenced by the writings of Leo Tolstoy, which have an anarchist element. And he inspired millions of Indians to withstand enormous physical and political violence by the imperial British State without retaliating violently or hating the colonizers themselves.

Gandhi in turn inspired leaders elsewhere such as Martin Luther King in the United States. Contemporary anarchists have also been influenced by philosophic insights in Taoism and Zen Buddhism particularly on the nature of self-reflection, respect and natural harmony.

Now such ideas may be very attractive but anarchist movements have almost never, really never held significant political office, and anarchist arguments for the reform of the state and the economy seemed to figure only rarely in general political life. But anarchist thinking has had and continues to have much greater influence than it is often recognized as having.

The reasons for this neglect, which amounts to censorship by silence, are very serious. They also tell us something about the nature of established political and economic power irrespective of the ideological positions taken by those who have such power. Well historically, anarchist greatest successes came during the Spanish civil war. That was a bitter conflict which ended in 1939 with victory for the fascist general Francisco Franco and led to 39 years of fascist dictatorship.

During the Civil War the largely anarchist republican movement held substantial areas, most notably the province of Catalonia. And they held them for long enough to establish a functioning system based on and embodying anarchist thought. In the 1930s, Spain already had a mass anarcho-syndicalist Trade union the "Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo", CNT, and it had

another group, the “Federacion Anarquista Iberica”, FAI, which spent most of its time in the political underground.

In July 1936 the CNT, the confederation of trade unions in particular, decided to fight the Morocco based Spanish generals who revolted against the government of the day the popular front, popular front government in Madrid. On the 18th of July the government was formed and reformed thrice in one day and the ministers involved then concluded that resistance to the generals would be futile.

But the CNT moved swiftly; they seized the weapons held by military garrison and by the civil, by the civil guards, the *Guardia Civil*. Crucially, the CNT also took control of factories, transport systems and land at that time two percent of land owners owned 67 percent of the land and many of the small holdings were too small even to feed a family. Especially in Catalonia, the locally based and anarchist-inspired economy was highly successful and the provinces whole political life took on anarchistic character which still endures.

The workers of the CNT-FAI took over the transport system in the provincial capital Barcelona, and they improved it substantially. The republican side faced enormous political and military odds and was eventually betrayed on several fronts. The Western democracies blockaded Spain under a purported non-intervention agreement which France and Britain favoured; but the United States and the United Kingdom covertly, secretly, helped Franco's forces; that is in work by Noam Chomsky.

Secondly, the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin decided to help Republicans, that is, the anarchist movements, but it did so on terms which effectively destroyed the Republican movement. The Soviet Union insisted on extortion at payments for weapons and thereby bled Spain's gold reserves, and it further required that the anarchists subordinate themselves to the existing popular front. That was the government which had already decided not to resist Franco.

Stalin's motives were utterly instrumental; he could not face the prospect that an anarchist or anarcho-socialist movement in Spain could undermine the Spanish Communist party, and he also feared that the anarchists would take control of British investments in Spain. Britain was a presumed Soviet ally in, I quote, “a democratic alliance” against Nazi, Germany. I have taken those materials from Ward's book on anarchism 2004 and from Guérin's book, a detailed book on anarchism, published in 1970 and reissued in 2010.

Well, the Spanish government itself may well have been alarmed by the success of the CNT's rapid moves, moves to reorganize not only agriculture but all work - with the free participation of peasants and other workers. This was an enormous threat even in conception to the Spanish government. The CNT had over a million members at the time in the mid-1930s, and one of its Regional Congresses in Catalonia decided to collectivise land, but the peasants were given a choice in this.

The slightly better off ones opted for individual property, while the poor farmers chose collectivization among the workers. Industrial workers - 90 percent chose to join collectives, and that created a rare joint movement of both agricultural and industrial workers. Now under the broad umbrella of the trade unions, the collectives were run as groups of small units, and in accordance with anarchist principles membership was not compulsory.

Even those who had opted out could still trade through shops run by the collective or by communal bodies, and they could receive some of the benefits of membership. In Catalonia where there was a tradition of small and medium-sized farms only a few pilot collectives were created. But in the neighboring province of Aragon more than three quarters of the land was socialized.

Well, anarchist thinking seems to have been followed as closely as possible. For example, regional planning in Catalonia at that time and in other parts of Spain was federal in nature. Agricultural yields improved immediately; the collectives turned out to be more successful than the communes, and when graduates of agricultural colleges contributed their knowledge, yields rose by between 30 and 50 percent.

In the Levant - a particular part of Spain the citrus farmers outperformed big private farmers, even in business dealings and they accounted for 70 percent of the trade. The local bodies further more organized the lectures films and plays, which the largely illiterate peasants relished. They also showed a great degree of solidarity which greatly impressed the visiting British independent Labour Party member Fenner Brockway.

The number of people involved in such agricultural self-management soon reached half a million in a total of some 900 collectives. The Catalonian achievements in industrial self-management were even more impressive; Catalonia was the most industrialized area in Spain and for four months in 1936, almost all the factories and public services in the provincial capital, Barcelona, were under workers' self-management.

In fact, many of the private owners who were terrified of the workers had fled. In October 1936, 600,000 attended a trade union congress in Barcelona. And it was highly significant that qualified engineers from the professional classes also participated, unlike their counterparts in other parts of Spain and in Italy.

On the 24th of October 1936, the Catalan, the Catalonian, government issued a decree confirming or ratifying the new state of affairs. All establishments with over 100 workers were to be socialized, and in fact farms of all sizes were socialized because many of the farmers were heavily in debt. The new system was highly successful, especially in running urban services and foreign services, foreign observers I beg your pardon, foreign observers were full of praise for the workers' enthusiasm and commitment.

But the successes were undermined even by the pre-Franco Government. Some of its ministers were pro-Soviet, and they feared the prospect of genuine workers' control. They also decided against the takeover private factories and lands. The agricultural Minister was strongly Stalinist. He was called Vicente Uribe, and he even told private landowners that the Communist party's weapons were at their disposal - and he ensured that they got imported fertilizers which were denied to the socialist, to the socialized farms.

Now, Uribe and his fellow Stalinist Juan Comorera, who was put in charge of the Catalan economy, even mobilized small and medium-sized farmers against the, against the Socialist farmers. They disguised large landowners or small holders and then they privatized the organization of Food supplies in Barcelona.

As if that were not enough the 11th mobile division under Commander Enrique Lister invaded Aragon with tanks, but even then the peasants resisted - and as soon as the Lister division had gone, they rebuilt their collectives. The communist Party seemed to realize how much it had, how much damage it had done.

But whether it is realized, its leaders realized, how much they had reinforced the position of the landowning classes is less clear; perhaps the question arises of whether the Republican government was even on Franco's side, or if it wanted solely to make sure the anarchist movements got nowhere. The Spanish civil war ended in April 1939, and Franco's regime, which endured for nearly 40 years, was so brutal that after his death the *Guardia Civil*, the civil guard themselves, had to be protected against violent revenge by the public.

The historical record is that anarchist movements have been hated, feared and crushed by all forms of established power, whether by broadly capitalist states or by communist or state capitalist ones, or by established religious authorities. Anarchist ideas, including ideas on political economy, are therefore essential to an understanding of the challenge anarchism poses to all forms of authority.

Well, we're coming to the main anarchist ideas and I'll give you the headings now. We'll put up a Powerpoint slide for you once I've prepared that. But I'll briefly introduce the two main types of anarchist ideas first, and then we will look at the main themes in anarchism.

Anarchist thought falls into two broad types, collectivist anarchism and individualist anarchism. The greatest difference between the two is in their respective approaches to economics or political economy, but they have a strong common element in what amounts to an implacable opposition to the moderated or managed capitalism favored by social democrats or Keynesians and also to the now-defunct state socialist or state-capitalist systems.

The most obvious examples of those were the Soviet Union and until relatively recently China, even though China remains a one-party state, as does North Korea, or more precisely the democratic People's Republic in Korea. But collectivist anarchists reject social democracy for doing nothing more than soften capitalist exploitation without ending it or even replacing it with a better system. They reject state socialism, on the other hand, for creating exploitation by the state as well as having a monopoly over political power. So, individualist anarchists reject social democracy for in fact, in effect, enabling the emergence of both by private and public monopolies and for limiting property rights and freedoms.