

Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices
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Anarchism Main Ideas and Examples. The Mondragón Corporation

Well, we'll start by looking at collectivist anarchism; there are two forms here, collectivist anarchism and the second form is individualist anarchism. We'll cover collectivist anarchism, to start with; it takes range of forms, it is closer to generally socialistic origins anarchism and individualist anarchism which is a somewhat later development.

Well, like socialism, collectivist anarchism relies on a view of human being as social beings. And therefore, considers we are better suited to cooperation and collaboration than we are out of the pursuit individual self-interest. This is not a naive idea; it is similar to Marx's recognitions that we can only be made sense of as species being as this species which survives by collaborating and cooperating reasonably and by transforming the world by acting upon it and transforming ourselves in the process.

Anarchism, anarchist thinkers, wouldn't necessarily reject that, but Marx in a sense carries a somewhat more substantially philosophic account with the implication that we cannot be understood as anything else. Anarchism certainly relies on a view of human being as social beings, and that carries an implication, less obvious than it is in Marx, that we are better suited to corporation collaboration than we are to individual self-interest.

This is not a naive idea that we're inherently good; the anarchist view is that when we recognize our common humanity we do not need government. According to anarchists, governments always replace freedom with oppression and they make it impossible - the very idea of government, the very existence of government makes it impossible to achieve any significant social solidarity, which Kropotkin calls mutual aid. He's is one of great anarchist thinkers – Count Pyotr Kropotkin.

But what's so important about anarchism here? Well, the point is that anarchism resists the very idea of imposed authority of any kind. Now according to anarchism, all government replaces, always replaces freedom with oppression and makes it impossible to achieve solidarity. We have seen this in our analysis of the exercise on Marx's.

We have seen it stated in relation to Marx, we seen the recognition stated that that capitalist production atomizes us and atomizes our sense of ourselves to the point where even very serious crises - mass unemployment, the mass collapse of economies and the like - result in

not in revolutionary anger but in passivity. The *Economist*, even the *Economist*, recognizes that today's responses to severe economic insecurity and even collapse are populist and xenophobic rather than, rather than collective or directed against capitalism itself.

Well, we need to get back to anarchist thinking. Social solidarity according Kropotkin is mutual aid, and the 18 century English philosopher William Godwin held that free individuals could reach reasoned argument about how to live and work together, and so we don't need a higher authority. According to collectivist anarchists, free and voluntary organization is the best defense against the self-aggrandizing tendency of the state and the corresponding imperatives in capitalism.

It's also the best alternative to it. Now this is not, this has echoes of liberal thinking - a permanent fear of the state, a permanent fear that all public institution will result in tyranny or continue to expand their power unless we can hold them in check. But liberalism has very little account of political economy beyond either *laissez-faire* economics or some form of modified capitalism in the form of social democracy

But anarchist thinking on free and voluntary organization has two main sources. One is in the work of Peter Kropotkin, he's today called Peter Kropotkin. He was Count Pyotr Kropotkin, he was an aristocrat, a 19th century Russian geographer, he travelled very extensively in Russia and then went into exile, and during this time he observed many different forms of cooperation.

He was particularly impressed by impressed by the watch makers in the Jura region in Switzerland. They were self-employed craftsmen and they organized themselves without any authority or direction from above. In the eastern region of the then Russian Empire, a very long way from Moscow, Kropotkin also saw how central administration funding, together with ignorance, incompetence and corruption destroyed ancient local institutions and practices.

The rich got richer, poor got poorer, and the administrative system was suffocated by boredom and embezzlement. Ward says here – I've drawn this from Wards' book on this - similar literature can be found in almost any other empire or nation state. We're not unfamiliar with far-flung bureaucracies, which suffocate, which destroy, which grow progressively more corrupt – we're not unfamiliar with that almost anywhere in the world.

But Kropotkin never made, never made the mistake of thinking people would naturally good. He saw a potential for good in all human beings and he concluded that human beings as social beings. We're better suited to working together possibly even for the common good

than to advancing our own self-interest. Kropotkin also concluded that when people recognize that, they cooperate better than they compete, and then they do not need regulation by government or control by government or any such thing.

According to anarchists, government replaces freedom with oppression and makes social solidarity, which Kropotkin calls mutual aid, impossible. But this not have to be confined to smaller localized activities. The scale of the work or the system concern may well be relevant. The railway networks of Europe and Asia, and the postal systems of virtually the whole world, coordinate their work, and they do it so well that is possible to travel by rail across two continents or send a letter from anywhere to almost anywhere with minimal involvement by government. They just get on with it and do it.

Well, the Spanish examples also show more things. Organization does not have to mean bureaucracy. Even the British welfare state, which is actually a nationwide range of services and organizations arose not from the great expansion of state services after the Second World War, but from a vast network of local mutual societies and friendly societies which the British working classes created in the 19th century.

In fact the British National Health Service, that is, the most loved and trusted institution in the United Kingdom even more than the - it is held even greater esteem and regard than the monarchy - the National Health Service, well, has its origins in the Tredegar area of south Wales. The Tredegar Workmen's Medical Aid and Sick Relief Fund, later called the Tredegar Workmen's Medical Aid Society ran from 1890 until 1995. It took a voluntary contribution from every worker in the district and it provided medical care to everyone who lived within the district. The principle of NHS is still precisely that. It is funded from general taxation and all who are resistant in the United Kingdom are entitled to free treatment, sometimes including long-term care.

Scotland provides long-term free care, through its local authority services if I am not mistaken; it still does that. The man who created the NHS was the MP for Ebbw Vale in Wales that is constituency in which the town of Tredegar lies he was called Aneurin Bevan, he was Labour Minister for health – that his, the Labour Secretary of State for Health, the minister for health, and he created the NHS - and saw it inaugurated in July 1948.

Well, the national organization of the NHS of course has been anything but local, and quite often both staff and patients virtually on the UK's 64 million people are patients, have often been reduced to – well, helpless bewilderment, sometimes worse, by a permanent ferment of top-down reform and bullying managerialism; this has had a lot of coverage at the British

national press and for the last two decades or more it seems to have had the sole purpose of ensuring that numerical targets and little else are met.

This top-down control has been a consistent process irrespective of the party in power in the London. Some of those involved have admitted mistakes, often too late; for example, various hospital architects have acknowledged that some of their designs, their hospital designs, have been badly misconceived; even some of the many management consultants brought in have later recognized that at least some of the damage is things, is the result of, things they have done.

Well, it may be impossible to tell how many millions of ordinary people have paid the price for that, or what kind of price they have paid. In addition, many on the British political centre-left were badly shocked to discover in the in the early 1980s and thereafter that substantial portions of the British working classes hated the very institutions which had been meant to support them in leading a decent life.

These institutions included the state benefit system, local municipal authorities, the school education system, and so on. Some of the political activists involved belatedly realized that the arrogance and high handedness which frequently characterized such institutions made an enormous contribution to public support for right-wing political parties like the Conservatives – who've taken major steps to abolish public institutions and services. Instead, some on the left have proposed very different institutions, which are meant to work much more collaboratively with the public. No serious anarchist would be surprised by that, neither would they be surprised that the body such as the European Union has grown steadily more remote from its own publics

The EU started in 1951 as the European Coal and Steel Community, and even then it was committed to the localizing principle of subsidiarity, which is the principle is that EU law - which overrides the member-states' domestic law - EU law and all government which is not covered by the EU's own supranational institutions should be implemented at the lowest and most local level possible. If needed such functions should such law and functions should be transferred upwards to higher levels only with local consent.

Not all the institutions of the EU have colluded in the process whereby the EU has become progressively more remote from its own citizens. The European court of justice has tried to, has tried to preserve people's rights against their own governments. For example, in the case of *Marshall*, the ruling in 1986 was that Southampton and South West Hampshire Health Authority (Teaching) had breached the EU's Equal Treatment Directive, because

they'd made a radiographer named Marshall retire earlier than her male colleagues. In the case of *Foster versus British Gas* 1990, the European Court of Justice ruled that a privatized former state-owned utility was required to follow the Equal Treatment Directive. In *Francovich*, 1991 the court decreed that individuals who'd suffered harm because member states had failed to protect rights under what was then European Economic Community law could sue their own government for damages.

Now, that's a way in which the European Court of Justice Itself has protected rights at very low levels of the whole EU system, 528 million people, 28 member states, and so on. The principle of subsidiarity is something that anarchist thinkers would no doubt approve of; they'd probably want very much more of it as well.

Well, unfortunately certain of the EU's institutions such as the European Commission have done a lot of damage, to destroy the principle of subsidiarity. For example, they have accepted and implemented without hesitation and apparently without public consultation major ideas put forward by the biggest corporation in EU – such as, you know these ideas include the single European Act, one of the most important treaties within the world's biggest trading bloc. What does that do? It creates a single market in goods and services, one of the most significant pieces of legislation since the, since the European Coal and Steel Community was formed in 1951. Other proposals put forward by the major corporations in the European Economic Community and the EU include the Channel Tunnel between the United Kingdom and France, the Sweden-Denmark road bridge, and the EU-wide road-building programme.

Now the European parliament is the only elected body among EU all the EU institutions, but it was created as an afterthought in 1979. That is, well, 22 years after the formation of the European Economic Community, 28 years after the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community. The European Parliament cannot initiate legislation. That is done by the civil service of the EU, namely the European Commission; the European Parliament can reject or amend draft EU law under a procedure, called co-decision, but it allows the great bulk of EU law through under a weaker process called the consultation procedure - and that gives it much less power; it's a much weaker procedure. Well nevertheless, anarchist ways of thinking, and of doing this, are much widespread than current political discourse seems to recognize. And they continue to have more impact than we often acknowledge; even at the height of the industrial revolution the bulk of production was carried out not in vast factories but in small workshops.

Electricity facilitated, facilitated decentralization and another factor in decentralization was mechanized transport. That is even a feature of today's so called advanced economies; one of the few serious studies of small businesses found that the owners were largely not thrusting Thatcherites or Reaganites but people who are more like creative rebels against, against the idea of being an employer or an employee. This again need be no surprise; in industrial psychology, any number of studies have shown that satisfaction in work and enjoyment of work with clear implications for creativity and productivity are centrally linked to autonomy at work and the freedom to make informed and authoritative decisions.

Well, just as importantly, the self-employed often detest, I quote, 'the whole modern capitalist ethic' and tend to express their commitments in terms of providing a good service or doing a job that is in Ward's book, it's a citation from someone called Thomson. Well, this been tried. One of the most remarkable attempts in the world to organize very large numbers of people on explicitly anarchist lines is the Mondragón Corporation in the Basque region of Spain - it borders France. This was founded by a Spanish priest in 1956 and has employed over 80,000 people in different businesses; that includes the production of what we would consider industrial goods such as domestic appliances. In 2013 Mondragón had global sales of 15 billion euros. It was the tenth largest corporation in Spain.

It is in fact a federation of about a hundred semi-autonomous cooperatives, and they contribute - each of the contributing cooperatives - contributes to joint initiatives, and they make larger decisions together; managers' salaries are capped at eight times workers' salaries. The *Economist* has – and Leo Panitch have both looked at capping salaries – Leo Panitch, not the *Economist*, and concludes that it is, it is only cosmetic. In the way Mondragón, an anarcho-syndicalist cooperative works, it is central to - capping managers' salaries is central to the ethos of the organization.

If workers have been made redundant by one firm within the system, they have often been re-employed by others within the federation. Mondragón has 15 research and development centres and it has its own university, mainly for business management studies.

Working schedules are adapted to give staff time for significant family and other such commitments, and it appears that in work the staff have considerable autonomy in making everyday decisions. Well, this leads us to an area of life where anarchist thinking has had considerable impact. Of course Mondragón recognizes the importance of ideas and shared ideas and sharing the findings, but it's often been held in great suspicion by the major private sector corporations of Europe. It's quite likely that conservative Spanish governments have viewed it with deep suspicion.

But there is an area of life where anarchist thinking had had an immense impact, and that is education. Anarchist philosophers always have always taken education extremely seriously. Proudhon saw education for work as a matter of pride, because work was something to be proud of. It's a source of dignity and value, and Proudhon also thought education had to provide the young with wider accomplishments.

Kropotkin went further. He saw education as essential for boys and girls. The Spanish Anarchist Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, also called Francisco Ferrer, considered education for emancipation as equally essential; education for him was a liberating process. He had a French counterpart, Paul Robin, who set up a school, set up a school in which boys and girls learnt all subjects - cooking, needlework, metalwork - and they took part in all activities together.

Some of that is creeping back into contemporary education in many parts of the industrial world. It's appearing, particularly at junior levels, in South Asia for example, and very much in elite private junior schools.

But these ideas were decades ahead of their time. Robin was explicitly an atheist. And that seems to have been, seems to have been too much for the French, or the French authorities at the time, who were very mindful of the power and influence of the Catholic Church. But there was another French anarchist, called Sébastien Faure, who realized that the thing to do at that time was to stay out of the official education system, to have nothing to do with it, and Sébastien Faure set up schools which had nothing to do with that system.

We're not unfamiliar with such attempts in India, perhaps in all of South Asia; these have broadly been confined to elite sectors of the education system because of the need for self-funding - but you'll be aware that certainly in Tamil Nadu moves are afoot to alter and amend the entire ethos and functioning of junior schools. That was started, that process was started about 10 or 12 years ago, when teachers were taken seriously - as they said themselves for the first time - in planning schools and discussing what happened in schools.

They started to be paid very much better and they were trained to work in ways which an anarchist would readily recognize, that is, to set work make the work clear to the students, to the pupils and let them get on with it in groups while the teacher moves round assisting and advising, and I've actually seen this at work in a junior school in Tamil Nadu; but whether that system is, well, continues into the secondary system is less clear. I don't know about it because I haven't seen it or seen secondary schools.

But the fact is that the system in most State schools in Tamil Nadu would be is precise the kind of things that that anarchists will recognize and very much approve of. The teacher becomes a participant and someone to assist and advise and not to tell. Of course the continuing significance of exams results in the whole Indian education system might make - I say might make - a similar anarchist inspired attitude or anarchist informed attitude in the secondary schools more difficult to implement for the time being, but it can't be ruled out.

Well anarchist education thinking is had considerable impact in the United Kingdom; within a century anarchist thinking has transformed almost all schools, especially primary junior schools, and transformed them from near-prisons into places where teachers see themselves not as controllers but as guides and friends. Even here, there are still differences between libertarians and those who see themselves as progressive; libertarians, for some decades after 1960, often ran successful schools with no set curriculum.

The self-described progressives often worked in the formal system but were often were as controlling as those whom they replaced; and one change which anarchist thinking may have helped to bring about long before the European Court of Human Rights ruled against beating in schools - corporal punishment - was, well, dated from much earlier. It was ended in British schools by that particular ruling in a particular case over a school in the Isle of Man, but it had been abandoned much earlier in other parts of Europe and in Scandinavia, and may have been facilitated by post-war cultural changes - a much broader condition of social equality, and so on.

But what are the other achievements of anarchist movements? Among their Global achievements were the worldwide protests in 1997 against the 29 countries and various giant corporations, which were involved in the multi-lateral agreement on investment, the MAI. The MAI was leaked in advance and it provoked widespread anger that caused its abandonment. Needless to say, government's corporations and corporations revive the MAI, under the guides of the World Trade Organization.

Currently the draft Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership will extend even further the so called right of businesses to sue any country whose laws allegedly restrict the right to make profits. 'Rights' has to be understood in imagined inverted commas there. The tribunals involved will be entirely independent of any national legal system.

Now, these kinds of treaties amount to what is been called a charter for the corporate takeover of the world. The profits in question would of course be imaginary or hypothetical ones. At the time I wrote this, in 2016, the European Parliament was debating the TTIP, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Ppartnership, and members of the European parliament

- 700 and more of them - were receiving enormous numbers of protest mailings from constituents asking them to reject it.

Well, you'll be familiar no doubt with issues arising from the government's reactions, from government's reactions to the World Trade Organization; and their reactions to the WTO protests confirmed the worth of anarchist opposition to the very idea of the state. After the protests in Seattle in 1998 and 1999, if I remember rightly, the protesters gathered again at the WTO's later meetings in Gothenburg in Sweden and Genoa in Italy.

But the Swedish and Italian governments - members of the European Union and signatories to the European Convention on Human Rights, both States - turned both cities into fortresses with blockades and barbed wire that is been done at the WTO meeting in the United Kingdom since then. The police became violent and protesters were killed. Today, cities which host WTO and G7 meetings are put under near lockdown. The Soviet Union could not have done it better.

Anarchist ideas are therefore much more widely held than the dominant political discourses seem to admit, and they merit more detailed attention than they often get. We shall go on in the next class to talk about in the next lecture; we'll talk about mutualism and other forms of anarchism.

We'll then look at attempts to apply it and we'll look at issues and problems arising and where anarchism stands today. That will probably take us another two classes or perhaps three. So, we shall stop there for the moment and we'll resume next time with mutualism.