

Why Anarchists Oppose Militarism And Nationalism

Boston Anarchists Against Militarism (BAAM) & Boston NEFAC

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SO, WHAT EXACTLY IS AN ANARCHIST?

Over the years, many people of many different beliefs have adopted the label anarchists, and most self-identifying anarchists would agree that there are many schools of anarchist thought. We are anarchists of the social/communal school of thought, who believe, roughly, in working towards a society based on the values of community and mutual aid; direct democracy; non-hierarchical organization; the absence of class division; the absence of divisions based on race, gender and nation; and the absence of institutionalized authority figures (because power corrupts, and we know it). The term “anarchy” comes from the Greek “anarchos” and means “no ruler”, a condition which CEOs, bureaucrats and landlords would like everyone to believe is synonymous with “chaos”. Throughout this document, the term “anarchist” will be used to refer to social anarchists, although it is not always used in this context in the media.

ANARCHISTS ARE JUST TERRORISTS, ANYWAY...

According to Benjamin Netanyahu, former Prime Minister of Israel, terrorism is “the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming, and enacting of the innocent to inspire fear for political purposes” (as the former Prime Minister of a country that has committed countless terrorist acts against innocent people over the years, we certainly trust Mr. Netanyahu’s ability to define the term!).

There is no consensus amongst anarchists about the proper use of violence. However, there is nothing about violence that is central to anarchism, and many anarchists reject violence and terrorism, choosing instead peaceful protest and education to achieve their goals. A good anarchist case against terrorism can be read in “You Can’t Blow Up A Social Relationship” (available at flag.blackened.net)

No anarchist would support random, undirected acts of violence or destruction, or the attack of innocent people for political purposes.

SO ARE ANARCHISTS OPPOSED TO WAR?

Most anarchists are not pacifists, although some Christian anarchists (like Leo Tolstoy, who inspired Gandhi, who inspired King) reject all forms of violence. Like any form of struggle, war is sometimes necessary, even when what you’re fighting for is not perfect. Some anarchists might consider World War II such a war, because even though in the end the victors were American, British and other capitalists, the alternative of Nazi Fascism was much worse. Many anarchists have fought in wars of independence from colonialism, even though the new nationalist governments were still corrupt.

Anarchists believe in waging a class war — fighting for the rights of the working class against the wealthy classes who exploit their labor for profit, and ultimately fighting for a society where class does not exist. Most of the time, this is not a literal war and does not involve physical violence, but rather involves other forms of actions and ideas. However, when a war of revolution is the only way left to defeat the ruling class and establish or preserve a free society, anarchists are prepared to take up arms and fight.

GREAT, LET'S GO TO WAR THEN.

Not so fast! Anarchists believe SOME wars may be justified — especially wars of revolution to overthrow oppressors. Many anarchists have fought prominently in wars, like the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and hundreds of thousands of anarchists in the Spanish Civil War of 1936.

However, anarchists recognize that most wars are fought by the ruling elites of nations for their own economic and political interests, without regard for the interests of the civilians on either side. Throughout the years, American soldiers have been sent abroad to protect dubious political or economic interests (as in Haiti or Iraq), or engage in plain old imperialism (Vietnam, the Philippines, Grenada — to protect as one former Special Forces agent wryly put it, the strategic nutmeg supply from the communists — Laos, Puerto Rico, most of Latin America — you get the idea).

AMERICAN TROOPS FOUGHT FOR YOUR FREEDOMS, YOU TRAITOR!

While this may be true in some degree (e.g., the freedom to burn more oil and consume more resources per capita than any other nation on the planet, largely responsible for the much-vaunted American prosperity), mostly the American military has been used to fight against the freedom of other people around the world (and thereby ensuring American wealth, also known as American freedom). The School of the Americas (SOA) in Ft. Benning, Georgia, has for years trained Latin American dictators and their henchmen on methods of torture and repression, and have birthed some of the most evil paramilitaries the world has ever seen. Green Berets and Special Forces work regularly alongside such agents, training them in techniques of torture and repression. A military that creates such despots can have no honest motives of preserving freedom in the world.

The freedoms that exist in America were fought for and won, rather, by ordinary people. Starting from the Bill of Rights, which would not have been included in the Constitution (they're amendments!) if popular outcry had not necessitated it.

IF YOU'RE NOT FOR US, YOU'RE AGAINST US!

Let us be absolutely clear: Anarchists in no way support the actions of the terrorists responsible for the loss of life on September 11, 2001. We do not support the actions of Osama bin Laden, or the Taliban that supports him. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we must side with America. Indeed, anarchists (and many others) would point out the short-sighted American policies of supporting the Mujahideen guerrillas during the conflict with the Soviet Union (a fact that is carefully not mentioned), including arming them to the teeth (without which they would not have prevailed against the Soviet army), is largely the reason why moderate elements do not exist in Afghanistan today.

The American government has explicitly said that everyone must choose sides in the battle — neutrality is not allowed. Fine. The anarchist position is not one of neutrality. Just as we rejected both American Capitalism and Russian Communism, here too we reject both sides — the barbaric

Taliban rulers and the horrific American empire. We choose to side, rather, with the victims of both of these regimes — with the millions of Afghan peasants left to starve by the Taliban, displaced by the threat of American aggression, and sure to become collateral damage in American attacks; and with the billions of working class people across the world trapped in poverty by the American empire.

IT'S UN-AMERICAN TO OPPOSE THE WAR! WE HAVE TO DEFEND OUR COUNTRY!

Anarchists oppose the idea of nationalism, believing that America is a superior nation, and even patriotism, blind devotion to America. Emma Goldman, a famous anarchist, wrote: “Patriotism assumes that our globe is divided into little spots, each one surrounded by an iron gate. Those who had the fortune of being born on some particular spot, consider themselves better, nobler, grander, more intelligent than the living beings inhabiting any other spot. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone living on that chosen spot to fight, kill, and die in the attempt to impose his superiority upon all the others. The inhabitants of the other spots reason in like manner, of course...”

The flag is a symbol, but behind it stands a ruling elite. In the end, everything that is done in the name of “America” — national security, the health of the economy, anything — is done for the benefit of this ruling elite, even if it is at the expense of working class Americans (which, more often than not, it is!). The flag is a tool the ruling class can use to tie all the American people together, a cloth to bind Americans into believing that all that their government does is in their interest.

Nationalism is a choice: You may either follow the military and the president blindly, or you may think for yourself. You may embrace the flag in times of war and peace, when the army marches in defense of “national interests”. Or you may look behind the flag and see who is trying to pull your strings and manipulate your emotions.

As to defense of “our” country, we should consider, before we side with the oil barons and arms dealers who helped shape the Middle East as it is today — who ultimately are responsible for the half million Iraqi children dead of malnutrition following American sanctions — whether our interests really lie with them, or whether they are just as much our enemy as the fanatics who killed 5,000 civilians on September 11, 2001.

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