

Anarchist library
Anti-Copyright



The Black Flag of Anarchism

Paul Goodman

July 14, 1968

The wave of student protest in the advanced countries overrides national boundaries, racial differences, the ideological distinctions of fascism, corporate liberalism and communism. Needless to say, officials of the capitalist countries say that the agitators are Communists, and Communists say they are bourgeois revisionists. In my opinion, there is a totally different political philosophy underlying—it is Anarchism.

The actual issues are local and often seem trivial. The troubles are usually spontaneous, though there is sometimes a group bent on picking a fight in the brooding unrest. A play is banned, a teacher is fired, a student publication is censored, university courses are not practical or facilities are inadequate, the administration is too rigid, there are restrictions on economic mobility or there is technocratic mandarinism, the poor are treated arrogantly, students are drafted for an unjust war—any of these, anywhere in the world, may set off a major explosion, ending with police and broken heads. The spontaneity, the concreteness of the issues, and the tactics of direct action are themselves characteristic of Anarchism.

Historically, Anarchism has been the revolutionary politics of skilled artisans and farmers who do not need a boss; of work-

Paul Goodman
The Black Flag of Anarchism
July 14, 1968

The New York Times Magazine, July 14, 1968. Reprinted in
Anarchism, ed. Robert Hoffman, 1970.
reposted from: <http://www.ditext.com/goodman/flag.html>

en.anarchistlibraries.net

men in dangerous occupations, e.g., miners and lumbermen, who learn to trust one another, and of aristocrats who can economically afford to be idealistic. It springs up when the system of society is not moral, free or fraternal enough. Students are likely to be Anarchists but, in the immense expansion of schooling everywhere, they are new as a mass and they are confused about their position.

Political Anarchism is rarely mentioned and never spelled out in the press and TV. West and East, journalists speak of anarchy to mean chaotic riot and aimless defiance of authority; or they lump together communists and anarchists and bourgeois revisionists, infantile leftists and anarchists. Reporting the troubles in France, they have had to distinguish Communists and Anarchists because the Communist labor unions promptly disowned the Anarchist students, but no proposition of the Anarchists has been mentioned except for Daniel Cohn-Bendit's vaunting statement, I scoff at all national flags!

(The possibility of an Anarchist revolution—decentralist, anti-police, anti-party, anti-bureaucratic, organized by voluntary association, and putting a premium on grassroots spontaneity—has always been anathema to Marxist Communists and has been ruthlessly suppressed. Marx expelled the Anarchist unions from the International Workingmen's Association; Lenin and Trotsky slaughtered the Anarchists in the Ukraine and at Kronstadt; Stalin murdered them during the Spanish Civil War; Castro has jailed them in Cuba, and Gomułka in Poland. Nor is Anarchism necessarily socialist, in the sense of espousing common ownership. That would depend. Corporate capitalism, state capitalism, and state communism are all unacceptable, because they trap people, exploit them, and push them around. Pure communism, meaning voluntary labor and free appropriation, is congenial to Anarchists. But Adam Smith's economics, in its pure form, is also Anarchist, and was so called in his time; and there is an Anarchist ring to Jefferson's agrarian notion that a man needs enough con-

trol of his subsistence to be free of irresistible pressure. Underlying all Anarchist thought is a hankering for peasant independence, craft guild self-management and the democracy of medieval Free Cities. Naturally it is a question how all can be achieved in modern technical and urban conditions. In my opinion, we could go a lot further than we think if we set our sights on decency and freedom rather than delusory greatness and suburban affluence.)

In this country, where we have no continuing Anarchist tradition, the young hardly know their tendency at all. I have seen the black flag of Anarchy at only a single demonstration, when 165 students burned their draft cards on the Sheep Meadow in New York, in April 1967—naturally, the press noticed only the pretentiously displayed Vietcong flags that had no connection with the draft-card burners. (A black flag was also raised along with a red flag at the national convention of Students for a Democratic Society in East Lansing in June [1968].) Recently at Columbia, it was the red flag that waved from the roof. The American young are unusually ignorant of political history. The generation gap, their alienation from tradition, is so profound that they cannot remember the correct name for what they in fact do.

This ignorance has unfortunate consequences for their movement and lands them in wild contradictions. In the United States, the New Left has agreed to regard itself as Marxist and speaks of seizing power and building socialism, although it is strongly opposed to centralized power and it has no economic theory whatever for a society and technology like ours. It is painful to hear students who bitterly protest being treated like I.B.M. cards, nevertheless defending Chairman Mao's little red book; and Carl Davidson, editor of *New Left Notes*, has gone so far as to speak of bourgeois civil liberties. In the Communist bloc, unlike the Latin countries, the tradition is also wiped out. For instance, in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavian students who want civil liberties and more economic freedom

are called bourgeois, although in fact they are disgusted by the materialism of their own regimes and they aspire to workers' management, rural reconstruction, the withering away of the state, the very Anarchism that Marx promised as pie in the sky.

Worst of all, not recognizing what they are, the students do not find one another as an international movement, though they have a common style, tactics and culture. Yet there are vital goals which, in my opinion, can be achieved only by the immense potential power of youth acting internationally. Certainly, as a first order of business, they ought to be acting in concert to ban the nuclear bombs of France, China, Russia, and the United States; otherwise they will not live out their lives.

The protesting students are Anarchist because they are in a historical situation to which Anarchism is their only possible response. During all their lifetime the Great Powers have been in the deadlock of the Cold War, stockpiling nuclear weapons. Vast military-industrial complexes have developed, technology has been abused, science and the universities have been corrupted. Education has turned into processing, for longer years and at a faster pace. Centralized social engineering is creating the world forecast in Orwell's 1984. Manipulated for national goals they cannot believe in, the young are alienated. On every continent there is excessive urbanization and the world is heading for ecological disaster.

Under these conditions, the young reject authority, for it is not only immoral but functionally incompetent, which is unforgivable. They think they can do better themselves. They want to abolish national frontiers. They do not believe in Great Power. Since they are willing to let the Systems fall apart, they are not moved by appeals to law and order. They believe in local power, community development, rural reconstruction, decentralist organization, so they can have a say. They prefer a simpler standard of living. Though their protests generate violence, they themselves tend to nonviolence and are internationally pacifist. But they do not trust the due process of administrators

they offend the people they want to help. Sometimes blacks and Spanish-Americans have turned on them savagely. In my observation, the communication that they get with drugs is illusory, and to rely on chemicals in our technological age is certainly to be in a bag. Because the standard of living is corrupt, they opt for voluntary poverty, but there are also many useful goods that they have a right to, and needlessly forgo. And they are often plain silly.

The more sophisticated Provos have fallen for a disastrous vision of the future, New Babylon, a society in which all will sing and make love and do their thing, while the world's work is done by automatic machines. They do not realize that in such a society power will be wielded by the technocrats, and they themselves will be colonized like Indians on a reservation. In general, I doubt that it is possible to be free, to have a say, and to live a coherent life, without doing worthwhile work, pursuing the arts and sciences, practicing the professions, bringing up children, engaging in politics. Play and personal relations are a necessary background; they are not what men live for. But maybe I am old-fashioned, Calvinistic.

In fact, the dropouts are not unpolitical. When there is an important demonstration, they are out in force and get beaten up with the rest—though they are not radicalized. With their flowers and their slogan Make Love Not War, they provide all of the color and much of the deep meaning. One hippie group, the Diggers, has a full-blown economics, has set up free stores, and has tried to farm, in order to be independent of the System, while it engages in community development.

The Yippies, the Youth International Party (would that it were!), devote themselves to undermining the System; they are the ones who showered dollar bills on the floor of the Stock Exchange, tied up Grand Central Station, and tried to exorcise the Pentagon with incantations. And the Dutch Provos, the provotariat, who are less drug-befuddled than the Yippies improvise ingenious improvements to make society better as a means of tearing it down; they even won an election in Amsterdam.

On their side, the hippies claim that the New Left has gotten neatly caught in the bag of the System. To make a frontal attack is to play according to the enemy's rules, where one doesn't have a chance; and victory would be a drag anyway. The thing is to use jujitsu, ridicule, Schweikism, nonviolent resistance, by-passing, infuriating, tripping up, seducing by offering happy alternatives. A complex society is hopelessly vulnerable, and the fourteen-year-olds run away and join the gypsies.

This criticism of the New Left is sound. A new politics demands a new style, a new personality and a new way of life. To form cadres and try to take power is the same old run-around. The Anarchism of the dropouts is often quite self-conscious. It is remarkable, for instance, to hear Emmet Grogan, the spokesman of the Diggers, make up the theories of Prince Kropotkin right out of his own experiences in Haight-Ashbury, the Lower East Side, and riot-torn Newark.

But I think the dropouts are unrealistic in their own terms. Living among the poor, they up the rents. Trying to live freely,

and are quick to resort to direct action and civil disobedience. All this adds up to the community Anarchism of Kropotkin, the resistance Anarchism of Malatesta, the agitational Anarchism of Bakunin, the Guild Socialism of William Morris, the personalist politics of Thoreau.

The confused tangle of Anarchist and authoritarian ideas was well illustrated by the actions of Students for a Democratic Society in leading the protest at Columbia [in 1968].

The two original issues, to purge the university of the military and to give local power to the Harlem community, were Anarchist in spirit—though, of course, they could be supported by liberals and Marxists as well. The direct action, of nonviolently occupying the buildings, was classically Anarchist.

The issues were not strictly bona fide, however, for the S.D.S. chapter was carrying out a national plan to embarrass many schools during the spring, using any convenient pretexts, in order to attack the System. In itself, this was not unjustifiable, since the big universities, including Columbia, are certainly an important part of our military operations, which ought to be stopped. But the S.D.S. formulation was not acceptable. Since we cannot yet take over the whole society, let us begin by taking Columbia. I doubt that most of the students who participated wanted to take over anything, and I am sure they would have been as restive if ruled by the S.D.S. leadership as by the president and trustees of Columbia.

When the faculty came to life and the students' justified demands began to be taken seriously—in the normal course of events, as has happened on several other campuses, the students would have gone unpunished or been suspended for 45 minutes—S.D.S. suddenly revealed a deeper purpose, to politicize the students and radicalize the professors by forcing a confrontation with the police if the police had to be called, people would see the System naked. Therefore the leadership raised the ante and made negotiation impossible. The administration was not big-souled enough to take it whence it came, nor pa-

tient enough to sit it out; it called the police and there was a shambles.

To have a shambles is not necessarily unjustifiable, on the hypothesis that total disruption is the only way to change a totally corrupt society. But the concept of radicalizing is a rather presumptuous manipulation of people for their own good. It is Anarchist for people to act on principle and learn, the hard way, that the powers that be are brutal and unjust, but it is authoritarian for people to be expended for the cause on somebody's strategy. (In my experience, a professional really becomes radical when he tries to pursue his profession with integrity and courage; this is what he knows and cares about, and he soon finds that many things must be changed. In student disturbances, professors have not been radicalized to the jejune program of New Left Notes, but they have recalled to mind what it means to be a professor at all.)

Ultimately, when four leaders were suspended and students again occupied a building in their support, the S.D.S. tendency toward authority became frankly dictatorial. A majority of the students voted to leave on their own steam before the police came, since there was no sense in being beaten up and arrested again; but the leadership brushed aside the vote because it did not represent the correct position, and the others—I suppose out of animal loyalty—stayed and were again busted.

Nevertheless, the Columbia action was also a model of Anarchism, and the same S.D.S. leaders deserve much of the credit. In the first place, it seems to have halted the university's displacement of poor people, whereas for years citizenly protests (including mine) had accomplished nothing. When, because of police brutality, there was a successful strike and sessions of the college and some of the graduate schools were terminated for the semester, the students rapidly and efficiently made new arrangements with favorable professors for work to go on. They organized a free university and brought a host of distinguished outsiders to the campus. A group, Students for a Re-

If the young go along with actions organized by the Trotskyists or the Progressive Labor Party or some of the delusions of S.D.S., it is because, in their judgment, the resulting disruption does more good than harm. Compared with the arrogance, cold violence and inhumanity of our established institutions, the arrogance, hot-headedness and all-too-human folly of the young are venial.

The trouble with the neo-Leninist wing of the New Left is a different one. It is that the abortive manipulation of lively energy and moral fervor for a political revolution that will not be, and ought not to be, confuses the piecemeal social revolution that is brightly possible. This puts me off—but of course they have to do it their own way. It is inauthentic to do community development in order to politicize people, or to use a good do-it-yourself project as a means of bringing people into the Movement. Everything should be done for its own sake. The amazing courage of sticking to one's convictions in the face of the police is insulted when it is manipulated as a means of radicalizing. The loyalty and trust in one another of youth is extraordinary, but it can turn to disillusionment if they perceive that they are being had. Many of the best of the young went through this in the thirties. But at least there is no Moscow gold around, though there seems to be plenty of C.I.A. money both at home and abroad.

Finally, in this account of confused Anarchism, we must mention the conflict between the activists and the hippies.

The activists complain that the dropouts are not political and will not change anything. Instead, they are seducers who drastically interfere with the formation of cadres. (We are back to Religion is the opium of the people or perhaps LSD is the opium of the people.) Of course, there is something in this, but in my opinion the bitterness of the New Left polemic against the hippies can only be explained by saying that the activists are defensive against their own repressed impulses.

Cadre connotes the breaking down of ordinary human relations and transcending personal motives, in order to channel energy for the cause. For purposes of agitation, it is the Jesuit idea of indoctrinating and training a small band who then go forth and multiply themselves. The officers, discipline, and tactics of military cadres are determined in headquarters; this is the opposite of guerrilla organization, for guerrillas are self-reliant, devise their own tactics, and are bound by personal or feudal loyalty, so that it is puzzling to hear the admirers of Che Guevara use the word cadres. As a revolutionary political method, cadre-formation connotes the development of a tightly knit conspiratorial party which will eventually seize the system of institutions and exercise a dictatorship until it transforms the majority of its own doctrine and behavior. Etymologically, cadre and squad come from (Latin) *quadrus*, a square, with the sense of fitting people into a framework.

Obviously, these connotations are entirely repugnant to the actual motives and spirit of the young at present, everywhere in the world. In my opinion, the leaders who use this language are suffering from a romantic delusion. The young are not conspiratorial but devastatingly open. For instance, when youth of the draft resistance movement are summoned to a grand jury, it is very difficult for their Civil Liberties lawyers to get them to plead the Fifth Amendment. They will sacrifice themselves and get their heads broken, but it has to be according to their personal judgment. They insist on wearing their own garb even if it is bad for Public Relations. Their ethics are even embarrassingly Kantian, so that ordinary prudence and reasonable casuistry are called finking.

And I do not think they want power but just to be taken into account, to be able to do their thing, and to be let alone. They indeed want a revolutionary change, but not by this route. Except for a while, on particular occasions, they simply cannot be manipulated to be the shock troops of a Leninist coup. (I have never found that I could teach them anything else either.)

structured University, amicably split from S.D.S to devote itself to the arts of peace and work out livable relations with the administration. For a while, until the police came back, the atmosphere on the campus was pastoral. Faculty and students talked to one another. Like Berkeley after its troubles, Columbia was a much better place.

In Anarchist theory, revolution means the moment when the structure of authority is loosed, so that free functioning can occur. The aim is to open areas of freedom and defend them. In complicated modern societies it is probably safest to work at this piecemeal, avoiding chaos which tends to produce dictatorship.

To Marxists, on the other hand, revolution means the moment in which a new state apparatus takes power and runs things its own way. From the Anarchist point of view, this is counterrevolution, since there is a new authority to oppose. But Marxists insist that piecemeal change is mere reformism, and one has to seize power and have a strong administration in order to prevent reaction.

At Columbia the administration and the authoritarians in S.D.S. seem to have engaged in an almost deliberate conspiracy to escalate their conflict and make the Marxist theory true. The administration was deaf to just grievances, it did not have to call the police when it did, and it did not have to suspend the students. It has been pigheaded and vindictive. Worse, it has been petty. For instance, during the strike the sprinklers were ordered to be kept going all day, ruining the grass,—in order to prevent the students from holding free university sessions on the lawn. When a speaker addressed a rally, a sweeper had been instructed to move a noisy vacuum cleaner to the spot to drown him out. William J. Whiteside, the director of buildings and grounds, explained to a Times reporter that these bullhorn congregations lead to an awful lot of litter, so we have to get out there and clean it up. This from a university founded in 1754.

Consider two key terms of New Left rhetoric, participatory democracy and cadres. I think these concepts are incompatible, yet both are continually used by the same youth.

Participatory democracy was the chief idea in the Port Huron Statement, the founding charter of Students for a Democratic Society. It is a cry for a say in the decisions that shape our lives, as against top-down direction, social engineering, corporate and political centralization, absentee owners, brainwashing by mass media. In its connotations, it encompasses no taxation without representation, grass-roots populism, the town meeting, Congregationalism, federalism, Student Power, Black Power, workers' management, soldiers' democracy, guerrilla organization. It is, of course, the essence of Anarchist social order, the voluntary federation of self-managed enterprises.

Participatory democracy is grounded in the following social-psychological hypotheses People who actually perform a function usually best know how it should be done. By and large, their free decision will be efficient, inventive, graceful, and forceful. Being active and self-confident, they will cooperate with other groups with a minimum of envy, anxiety, irrational violence, or the need to dominate.

And, as Jefferson pointed out, only such an organization of society is self-improving; we learn by doing, and the only way to educate cooperative citizens is to give power to people as they are. Except in unusual circumstances, there is not much need for dictators, deans, police, prearranged curricula, imposed schedules, conscription, coercive laws. Free people easily agree among themselves on plausible working rules; they listen to expert direction when necessary; they wisely choose pro tem leaders. Remove authority, and there will be self-regulation, not chaos.

And radical student activity has in fact followed this line. Opposing the bureaucratic system of welfare, students have devoted themselves to community development, serving not as leaders or experts but as catalysts to bring poor people to-

gether, so they can become aware of and solve their own problems. In politics, the radical students usually do not consider it worth the trouble and expense to try to elect distant representatives; it is better to organize local groups to fight for their own interests.

In the students' own protest actions, like the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, there were no leaders—except in the TV coverage—or rather there were dozens of pro tem leaders; yet F.S.M. and other such actions have moved with considerable efficiency. Even in immense rallies, with tens of thousands gathering from a thousand miles, as in New York in April, 1967, or at the Pentagon in October 1967, the unvarying rule has been to exclude no groups on principle, no matter how incompatible their tendencies; despite dire warnings, each group has done its own thing and the whole has been well enough. When it has been necessary to make immediate arrangements, as in organizing the occupied buildings at Columbia or devising new relations with the professors, spontaneous democracy has worked beautifully. In the civil rights movement in the South, Martin Luther King used to point out, each locality planned and carried out its own campaign and the national leadership just gave what financial or legal help it could.

Turn now to cadres. In the past few years, this term from the vocabulary of military regimentation has become overwhelmingly prevalent in New Left rhetoric, as it was among the various Communist sects in the thirties. (My hunch is that it was the Trotskyists who gave it political currency. Trotsky had been the commander of the Red Army.) A cadre or squad is the primary administrative or tactical unit by which small groups of human beings are transformed into sociological entities, to execute the unitary will of the organization, whether army, political party, work force, labor union, agitation or propaganda machine. In Marxian terms, it is the unit of alienation from human nature, and young Marx would certainly have disapproved.