The Muslim Anarchist's Charter

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As-salaamu alaykum

One of my favourite teachers at High School was John Gottisman, who taught 'combined science'. A food chemistry graduate, he also lectured on the nightmares of mass produced food long before it was an issue outside hippy circles. True to his beliefs, John combined teaching with life as a self-sufficient organic farmer.

John also ran a crib club at school, where a group of favoured pupils became privy to his passion for the 19th century Anarchists, including Michael Bakunin (1814–1876). I still recall a story of how Bakunin once arrived in a small French town where police officials were terrorising the local population. Bakunin's response was to organise a militia, who attacked the offending police headquarters and burned it to the ground. With the oppressive poulets gone, Bakunin left to fight for another cause.

I was so impressed with this school-boy hero sketch that I looked up 'Anarchism' in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a resource my mother had successfully fought to retain during my

parents' acrimonious divorce. The utopia of a peaceful anti-authoritarian society, where all political and economic activity is decentralised, struck a deep chord with me. But I was most impressed by the claim that Anarchism is a political outlook founded on the belief that 'people are basically good'.

In the 1980s, I declared myself to be an 'Anarcho-pacifist', seeking to bring about an Anarchist utopia by peaceful means. I believed that, with the removal of the oppressive political, economic and social structures that determined people's lives, the world could become such a utopia. It's the kind of thing that every 21 year old druggy should believe. And today, drug-free, I still believe it.

The difference is, I now believe — like the French philosopher Michel Foucault — that oppressive political, economic and social forces govern people's lives by becoming integral to how we understand the world and ourselves. Before we can change the world, we need to understand how this governance takes place. In short, we need to free our minds of greed and envy by rejecting consumerism; we need to free our minds of fear and anger by rejecting patriarchy; and we need to free our minds from lust and self-righteousness by rejecting individualism.

Some Muslims want to create political edifices, and dream of a world ruled by Shariah law. The way I see things, that kind of thinking doesn't just blow up police stations. It sends aircraft flying into skyscrapers.

I say, forget power — let's build a society based on compassion. I say, forget law — let's unwrite the Shariah by purifying our hearts. We don't need to blow up police stations. We need to make them redundant. That, I sincerely believe, is the universal religion.

Wasalaam

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