

★ Thinking about Anarchism ★

# Policing and the Law

Many people don't see eye to eye with the police, Anarchists much included. While this opposition can manifest itself physically when the police employ repressive tactics, it must be stressed that it has far more to do with ideology and the harsh realities of disaster-capitalism than it does with being beaten off the streets.

Anarchists are opposed to policing in its current form since it embodies the antithesis of what we believe so strongly in: freedom. By being given a monopoly over force and violence, the legitimised abilities to pin you to the ground, silence you, lock you up - they have the power to violate your liberty at will, all in the name of the law. But who makes the law, and more importantly, whom does it serve?

The police force is the state's physical and intimidatory means of maintaining a desired status quo in society; one of socio-economic divisions and inequalities.

Alexander Berkman stated that crime "is the result of economic conditions, of social inequality, of wrongs and evils of which government and monopoly are parents". On the one hand we have the state, politicians, bosses and capitalists, who thrive on vast amounts of money and power. Instances of white collar crime, fraud and embezzlement that are actually investigated and brought before the courts are rare (they make up a small percentage of overall economically motivated crime). Most crime, and thus policing action, targets individuals and communities that suffer greatly from social and economic deprivation. In the last decade, crime has increased in areas like Tallaght and Blanchardstown.\* Drugs have devastated these communities, and economic and property related crimes have soared. Policing action in these areas, to quote Berkman again, "can only punish the criminal. They neither cure nor

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causes, and the government can never do that because it is there to preserve those very causes”.

To name but a few examples of policing displays that highlight the preservation of existing disparate conditions in society: the historic targeting of black communities in the USA (and the black-white prison ratio that demonstrates this), violent and repressive tactics used against those who stand up for their rights (workers and students who fight against cuts), police using their position of power to commit crimes themselves; violent assault being a big one (one has only to delve back some years to the Terence Wheelock tragedy). To put it plainly, the police have a vast amount of power given to them by the state, and they play a pivotal role in keeping society as it is: serving the interests of the few at the expense of the many.

But even in an anarchist society, freed from the clutches of capitalism, the free market and avarice (and thus a great deal of crime, since economic and property related crime would end, as would numerous other forms of crime, due to different approaches to education and socialisation), crime would probably not disappear entirely. There would still be people who are harmful to others and the general well being of society.

It is important to remember that while anarchists advocate dismantling the state apparatus, this does not at all mean that we believe in a society devoid of public services; meaning that the state being abolished would not preclude a fully functional health-care system, for example. As the Russian anarchist Kropotkin stated “voluntary associations” would “substitute themselves for the state in all its functions”.

The same would go, to an extent, for policing. Only that policing in an anarchist system would be very different to its present-day form. Proudhon (allegedly the first person to call himself an anarchist and very famous for his quote “Property is theft”) stated that in an anarchist society we would see the “police, judiciary, administration, everywhere committed to the hands of the workers”. If communities deemed it necessary to have a policing body to prevent anti-social behaviour, then a form of community policing would arise in which all inhabitants participated equally, either actively or by expressing their thoughts. There would not however be a monopoly over the protection of others, or as Malatesta puts it “the special function of the defence of society”.

\* Two poor communities in Ireland

**Contact:**

*From Workers Solidarity*

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