

peoples lives. It has been used to justify every instance, contemporary and historical, of subordination and elitism. It is the attitude that people don't want to be free and are happy doing what they are told.

*"I know that [civilized men] do nothing but boast incessantly of the peace and repose they enjoy in their chains.... But when I see [barbarous man] sacrifice pleasures, repose, wealth, power, and life itself for the preservation of this sole good which is so disdained by those who have lost it; when I see animals born free and despising captivity break their heads against the bars of their prison; when I see multitudes of entirely naked savages scorn European voluptuousness and endure hunger, fire, the sword, and death to preserve only their independence, I feel it does not behove slaves to reason about freedom."*

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau <sup>4</sup>

## SOURCES CITED

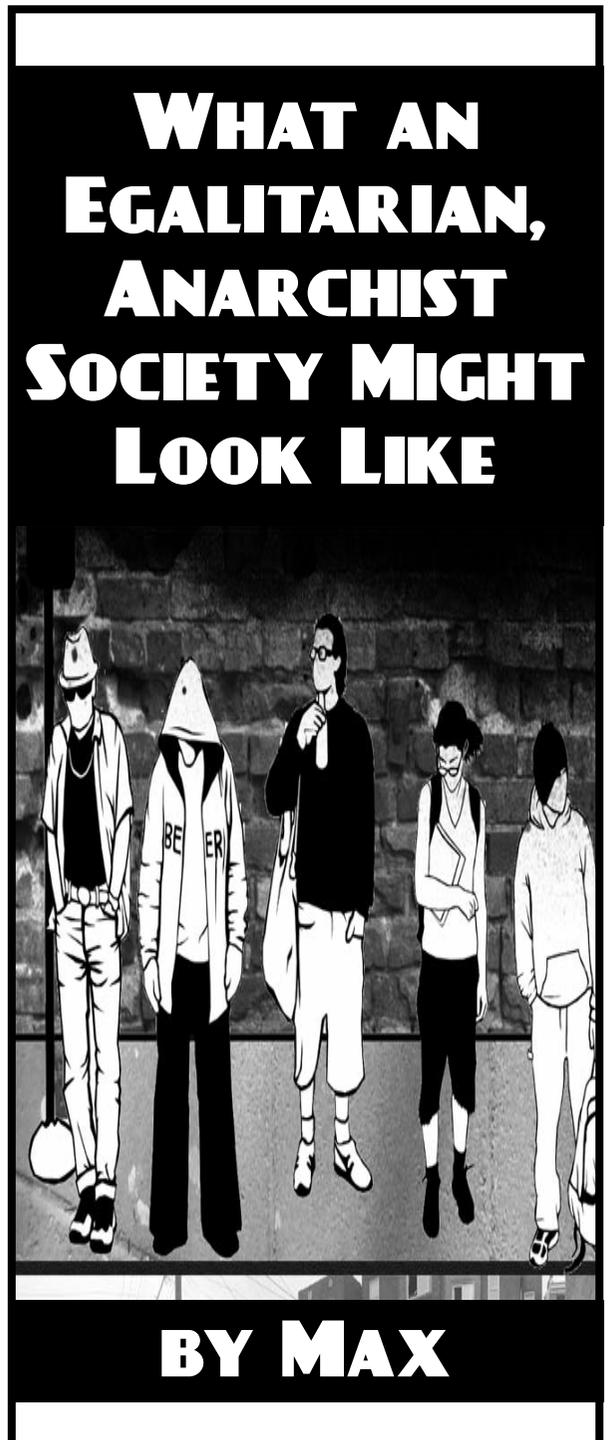
1. www.globalissues.com
2. Parker-Pope, Tara. "Time to Review Workplace Reviews," 5-17-10, <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/17/time-to-review-workplace-reviews/?ref=science>
3. Cook, John. "Child Food Security in the United States: 2006-2008." Feed America. 2010. (Note: this data from before the 2008-2009 market crash and it's likely the numbers have risen significantly since then.)
4. *Discourse on Inequality*, 1754

## FURTHER INFORMATION

- For a list of groups at USC that aspire to operate in a truly democratic and egalitarian fashion, check out the "Progressive Groups" page on the zine blog at [uscundercurrent.wordpress.com](http://uscundercurrent.wordpress.com).
- Noam Chomsky on Democracy: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBC\\_XICK7i0&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBC_XICK7i0&feature=related)
- An in-depth look at examples of 'Anarchy in Action': <http://www.infoshop.org/page/AnarchistFAQSectionA5>

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When confronted with models of society based on anarchist principles, many people's first reaction is that such a model of society is impractical. Before I broadly lay out what an anarchist society might look like, I'd ask what's practical about a country that spends nearly half of its tax revenues on its military,<sup>1</sup> that lets 30 million unemployed spend their productive energy looking for jobs and lets many others lose hope and stop looking, whose economy slumps into recessions every 5 years and occasionally crashes completely? What's practical about a society where of the people who are employed, only 45% report being satisfied with their jobs,<sup>2</sup> where only the rich are empowered to create policy, the number of children facing food insecurity is 14 million?<sup>3</sup> Any number of societies are possible and what constitutes practicality depends on what your values are.

Anarchists are generally hesitant to lay out in meticulous detail what a society without rulers might look like. They think the specifics plainly need to be ironed out through a process of trial and error, as with any broad and sweeping social change. That being said, it is very important to lay out general principles of organisation so as to serve as a guide and inspiration for those who are dissatisfied with the status quo.

The most fundamental organising concepts of an anarchist society are decentralization and bottom-up decision-making. People will make decisions about their lives collectively. Any time that decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of a minority, it becomes a system of self-propagating and self-interested power.

Another concept of organisation that anarchists believe in is that decisions should only be made by those whom the outcome of the decision affects. If the way you dress doesn't reasonably affect anyone other than yourself, nobody but you should have any say in what you wear. If there is a certain amount of floor mopping and bathroom cleaning that needs to be done within a community, that community should decide collectively as to how to share and distribute that work fairly. This is in sharp contrast to our society, where we force the poorest and least educated do it for as little pay as possible. Everyone should be responsible and have control

over their lives to the extent that their affairs are private matters, and every community should be responsible and have control over their affairs inasmuch as it is a communal matter.

The basic units of organisation in such a society would mostly be centred around the two primary areas of human activity: the places where people work and the communities in which people live. Councils open to everyone in the community or workplace would be set up around these two spaces and decisions would be made as a group so as to address everyone's concerns. If a community wants to erect a park, repave its roads (or bike trails) or extend hours at the local community-run day-care, the people living in the community would decide how to allot its resources accordingly. If a workplace wants to upgrade its machines or alter its service or product in some way, the people in the workplace would make the decision democratically in a meeting. This would be the implementation of true and equal democracy in place of the extreme hierarchies found in today's political and economic spheres.

These councils could then be federated up to larger and larger forms of organisation, say from community, to city, to continent, to the global level. At each higher level, delegates who are directly responsible to their lower-level communities could make more wide-ranging decisions. The important distinction between these delegates and the 'representatives' of our current system is that the delegates would be given no power whatsoever to make decisions beyond what their communities have already decided upon and would merely be conduits of information. Whatever higher level organisation is necessary, autonomy should be maintained as much as possible on the local level, higher delegates should be recallable any time the community chooses, and geographically larger councils should be contingent on the ratification of the local groups.

A common objection to anarchism and participatory democracy is to say, "People don't want to spend all of their time making decisions and attending endless meetings." However, in an anarchist society, the amount of time people as a whole in the community spend making decisions would not change all that much. In our society, decision-making is relegated full-time to those at the top, the politicians and the corporate administrators, and most people in their everyday lives have almost no direct influence over their community. What if, instead of having decision-making concentrated at the top, it was just spread out equally among people in society? To have people living under some

kind of order takes a certain amount of co-ordination — aka decision-making time and effort — and that co-ordinating power should lie equally in the hands all people in a society to be considered in any sense free.

Another refrain against letting people govern themselves is to argue, "People don't care about having a voice in the world." I believe people want control over their lives and this necessitates decision-making. Contrary to popular beliefs, having communal control over communal action is not a burden but is actually empowering and rewarding and rightly makes people feel like they have an organic hand in shaping society. Anarchists emphasize "creating the new society in the shell of the old" and forming groups in the here-and-now where true democracy does exist. This is one of the draws of people to anarchist activism — the chance to partake in groups where one isn't waiting for the experience of freedom until after 'the revolution', but where one actualises in the present their visions of a just and egalitarian society.

Seeing and identifying types of organisation that are not democratic is a good exercise for raising your awareness of the kind of society you live in. When you're participating in a meeting or a campaign or you read about an upcoming election, ask yourself if people have equal influence in the process. Are there small groups of people who run the show while the rest look on? Is there a president or a CEO in charge who was put there by the influence of stockholders or lobbying groups and advertising dollars instead of some communal will?

There are numerous examples of both long-lasting and larger scale societies run on principles approximating anarchism. Of course none of these societies were ideal and each had their problems, but nonetheless they provide one with hope regarding human social possibilities. A small sample of such instances includes the Northeast province of Catalonia in the early and mid 1930's, Jewish Kibbutzim in historic Palestine, especially before the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, the Paris Commune of 1871, and many, perhaps even most, hunter-gatherer societies that have occupied the vast majority of human prehistory. (See the following article in this issue for a contemporary example).

Anarchists don't just desire the freedom to choose between 17 different brands of cereal for breakfast. We desire freedom to not only collectively *be* society, but to collectively *run* society. But while we struggle to be free, there will be those who tell you that you don't understand human nature. There is an idea which has forever been invoked to maintain domination and control over