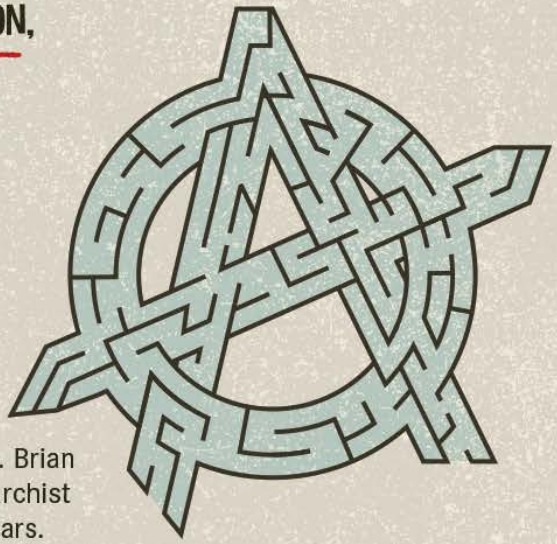
ANARCHISTS SEEK A WORLD

**WITHOUT GOVERNMENTS,
WITHOUT BOSSES,
WITHOUT DOMINATION,**



in which people collectively make the decisions that affect their lives. It's an attractive vision.

However, there are difficult challenges, and it's not always obvious how to proceed. Brian Martin has explored anarchist alternatives for many years.

In Anarchist Dilemmas, he tells of his search for anarchist answers on a range of topics, including voting, experts, bureaucracy, violence, power and work. Anarchists will pursue answers through their practice, as they always have, but it's worth making explicit some of the challenges they face.

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ANARCHIST DILEMMAS

BRIAN MARTIN

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Anarchist dilemmas

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Introduction

War, environmental destruction, exploitation, repression, economic inequality — there are lots of big problems in the world. They've been around for a long time. Is there a different way of doing things?

Anarchism is an attractive alternative. At least I thought so back in the early 1970s, when I first came across it. The idea is to get rid of rulers and bosses, the ones who run things, and have everything cooperatively managed by the people affected. That means ordinary citizens, rank-and-file workers.

It's an idealistic vision. Without people on top to cause misery, people could manage for themselves just fine. And it wasn't just imaginary. There were episodes in history, like Spain during the 1930s, when workers ran factories and people got together to help each other. It was a revolution: a different way of doing things. But it wasn't like the Russian Revolution or the Chinese Revolution, where a Communist party took control. No, in Spain it was different.

In Spain, the anarchists were opposed by both the fascists and the communists. As it turned out, the fascists won, and remained in power until the 1970s. It was different during the Russian revolution, which overthrew the dictatorial system of the Tsar. Workers took over factories. It could have been an anarchist revolution, but back then, in

1917, the Bolsheviks — more commonly known as the Communist Party — defeated the anarchists.

It seems like nobody likes anarchists, at least nobody who likes to have someone in charge. In what are called liberal democracies, with elected leaders, there is great hostility when workers take over a factory and try to run it without bosses. In the United States, the IWW — Industrial Workers of the World — was strong in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and detested by corporate owners, who used violence to try to destroy the union. The US government joined in.

I thought, there must be something going for anarchism if it is so hated by fascists, communists, corporate heads and elected governments. What is it about running things without bosses that's so threatening? Well, that's obvious enough. The bosses don't like it.

I started reading about anarchism, learning more about its theory and practice, and found others with similar interests. Over the years, over the decades, I've read a lot, enough to know that things are complicated. Concerning Spain in the 1930s, scholars have pored over every available document and debated with each other, for example about anarchist strategy. You can read dozens of books about the Spanish revolution.

The Spanish experience is just one of numerous occasions when communities sought to organise their lives without bosses. And revolutionary times are not the only thing to learn about. In every aspect of life — housing, education, art, technology, you name it — there are anarchist initiatives, perspectives and critiques. There's a

lot to learn, not to mention participating in anarchist-inspired practices.

So when I thought it might be useful to write about some of the things I've learned about anarchism, I paused. What about things we don't know about anarchism, especially how to bring it about? When I say "we," I mean me — and perhaps others like me who haven't studied all the issues in depth. As well as describing some of the things I've learned, I'll try to point out things I'd like to know, including difficulties and challenges.

Anarchism is built on cooperation, on people joining together to build the society they would like to live in. It seems straightforward to say that this should include knowledge about how to do it. In other words, no one person, no one group, has all the answers. We can't rely on some guru or leader to provide the path forward. Yes, we can learn from those who have knowledge and experience, but we shouldn't follow them without thinking for ourselves.

The following chapters are my attempt to spell out some things about anarchism that still need to be learned or sorted out. I've picked topics that have especially interested me, which means there are many gaps. I've included details about how I learned about some of these topics, to show that the path is personal, sometimes haphazard and often drawn out. Others will have different journeys.

I've referred to some of the challenges for anarchists as dilemmas. Technically, a dilemma is a choice, usually between two options, sometimes more, where there are no definite criteria for what to do. Should I take a job where I can do more good even though it compromises my princi-

ples? Should I lie for a good cause? In dilemmas, there are usually no right or wrong answers, because different principles are involved.

Some readers will say, that's not a dilemma or challenge, because the answers are already out there. This is especially true at the level of ideas. Many creative thinkers have proposed ways to run groups, organise work, bring down the state and deal with every other challenge facing those trying to bring about a better society. It's good to think of answers, of solutions, but they need to work in practice, not just in theory. Getting things to work in practice — that's not easy. We know it's not easy, because otherwise states around the world would have been superseded by new systems without rulers.

The point of looking at dilemmas and challenges is to tackle difficulties. It's easy to say what's wrong with the world, with all its war, environmental destruction, exploitation and inequality, but that's only a starting point. The next step is envisioning alternatives. Anarchism is pretty good at this, but some anarchist alternatives are sketchy, relying on people, when freed from domination, to organise themselves in sensible ways. But when bosses and rulers are swept away, what's to stop new ones from taking over?

Even when alternatives are well developed, with plenty of examples of how they are working right now, there's always the challenge of how to expand them, to have them become the norm rather than the exception. That's a question of strategy, of how to get from where we are now to a desired future. Is there a generic anarchist strategy? If so, who knows what it is and how are they helping others to support it, to be part of the change?

Anarchism is both a vision of an alternative and a set of ideas and practices about how to move towards this vision. Each of the following chapters addresses a specific topic. Can these all be put together into an overall strategy? Maybe not, and in any case there is no single strategy for promoting anarchism, because the process needs to be participatory, not coordinated from the top. Efforts in a range of domains can contribute to this process, which means that looking at specific topics can offer insights about how to proceed.

2
Bureaucracy

On hearing the word "bureaucracy," many people think of government agencies and "red tape," those administrative obstacles that get in the way of doing things. It's when you have to register your dog and get sent from one office to another, or one phone number to another, until given the advice that you have to fill out a form that is infuriating to download and then turns out to be the wrong one. That's bureaucracy: arbitrary rules enforced by unhelpful staff. They're bureaucrats, a word that's seldom a compliment.

For sociologists, "bureaucracy" has a technical meaning. It refers to any organisation based on hierarchy and a division of labour. Hierarchy refers to some people having a higher rank than others. In other words, workers have bosses, and the bosses have bosses, and so on up the line. Division of labour means that workers have specified tasks. In a bus company, there are drivers, mechanics, accountants, publicists, managers and various others. Labour is "divided" in the sense that most workers stick to one sort of task. The top managers don't drive buses or fix them, and the drivers and mechanics don't sit on the board of management.

With this definition, bureaucracy doesn't refer just to government agencies. Any organisation can be a bureaucracy: a corporation, church, army, hospital, police force or trade union. In practice, most large organisations, ones with

hundreds or thousands of employees, fit the sociological definition of bureaucracy.

As well as hierarchy and division of labour, there are several other typical features of bureaucracies. Usually there are rules that workers are supposed to follow. This affects customers, where rule-following is seen as red tape, but also affects the workers, who may be just as frustrated as anyone else.

Deena Weinstein

In the old days, before the Internet, I used to read lots of magazines. In 1982, for some reason I was reading the journal *Telos,* a high-brow theory journal, and saw a review of another journal, the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory.* One article mentioned in the review seemed especially interesting. It was by Deena Weinstein and titled "Bureaucratic opposition: the challenge to authoritarian abuses at the workplace," published in 1977. I requested a copy through interlibrary loan and was soon reading the article and taking notes on it.

On the first page, Weinstein stated, "Resistance to formal organizational authority by individuals or informal groups is an ignored phenomenon in the social sciences."[1] She told about how political opposition in white-collar work differed from that in blue-collar work, and made a crucial point: challenges to authority within bureaucratic

1 Deena Weinstein, "Bureaucratic opposition: the challenge to authoritarian abuses at the workplace," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory,* vol. 1, no. 2, Spring-Summer 1977, pp. 31–46.

organisations are like political opposition movements, in other words like contending political parties and movements. There is one important difference. Within organisations, opposition movements seldom use force, and if they do, managers can call in the police.

Weinstein told about ways that managers suppress open dissent, including dismissal, transfer, blacklisting and threats. However, habits of obedience are the main obstacle to taking part in opposition. She concluded that the similarities between political conflict in the public domain and conflict within organisations showed that these two domains shared a crucial feature: hierarchical control. The experience of struggles within bureaucracies showed the problems of collective action in a world increasingly governed by abstract hierarchical control.

For me, this was heady stuff. After reading her article, I immediately wrote to Weinstein, a professor of sociology at DePaul University in Chicago. After noting my interest in dissent within science and academia, and enclosing one of my articles about this, I wrote,

> … more importantly, I am interested in ways in which grassroots activists can help transform bureaucracies to be both internally satisfying and externally responsive, in particular in relation to the peace movement. The problem in moving towards a world without war is the military establishment and the related bureaucracies of the nation state. It seems that in the peace movement there is little idea of an alternative to these structures, and almost no thought about how to transform the present structures.

I concluded by asking her for suggestions or references relevant to these concerns. Even before she replied, I came across her book *Bureaucratic Opposition,* published a couple of years after her article. I saw it while visiting the library at the University of New South Wales, in Sydney, and immediately requested it through interlibrary loan.[2]

The key idea in *Bureaucratic Opposition* is that bureaucracy is a political system, in other words, a system based on the exercise of power. Weinstein said a bureaucracy has many similarities to a state, specifically to an authoritarian state.

In a dictatorship, there are no genuine elections. Political parties are not allowed, or are puppets of the government. There are no civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, or freedom from arbitrary arrest. It can be harsh for anyone who challenges the government.

All these features are found in bureaucracies. There are no elections, and no "organisational parties" that can contest elections. There's no choice in who runs the organisation. There's no freedom of speech. What are thought of as civil liberties do not exist.

The idea that bureaucracy is a political system — a system based on authoritarian power — was and remains quite different from the usual social science approach. There's a large amount of writing about bureaucracies as a way of organising work: how they operate, how they

2 Deena Weinstein, *Bureaucratic Opposition: Challenging Abuses at the Workplace* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979).

interact with each other, how they are controlled, how they affect those who work in them, how to make them run more efficiently, and much else. Most of this research assumes bureaucracies are the way they are because they are effective for dealing with administrative tasks. This approach, which assumes functionality, serves bureaucratic elites by obscuring their exercise of power.[3]

Opposition

Weinstein looked at reasons why most workers conform rather than rebel. Despite the obstacles, workers may decide to openly question and challenge their superiors. Weinstein calls this bureaucratic opposition — the title of her book. She says two sorts of abuses give rise to bureaucratic opposition.

The first sort is deviations from the "bureaucratic ideal," which is the way the organisation is supposed to operate. Consider the FBI in the US. Sibel Edmonds worked there, translating documents. She discovered layers

3 Insightful treatments of bureaucracy include Bengt Abrahamsson, *Bureaucracy or Participation: The Logic of Organization* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977); David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2015); Ralph P. Hummel, *The Bureaucratic Experience,* 5th edition (New York: Routledge, 2007); Henry Jacoby, *The Bureaucratization of the World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973); Charles Perrow, *Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1979).

of corruption, and corruption can be thought of as a deviation from, or violation of, the bureaucratic ideal.[4]

The second sort of abuse is grounded in disputes over policies. A famous example concerns spying by the National Security Agency in the US. Edward Snowden saw this as an abuse. He collected a huge volume of data about NSA activities and shared it with the media. As an individual, he was an opponent of NSA policies.

For me, Weinstein's work provided a crucial insight. Seeing bureaucracies as power systems enabled a link between challenges to the state and challenges to government bureaucracies. Here's what I wrote to her on 26 September 1982 after reading *Bureaucratic Opposition.*

> Social defence is an alternative to military establishments, the same way energy efficiency and renewable energy is an alternative to nuclear power and coal. But social defence by itself is not enough; there has to be a challenge to the military, the same way that the anti-nuclear power movement challenged the nuclear establishment. But in the peace movement such a challenge is almost non-existent (the peace movement seems mostly concerned with convincing everyone, especially decision-makers, how terrible nuclear war is). In thinking about how to go about challenging the military establishment(s), it was obvious that this meant challenging the state, with which the military is closely associated. And challenging the state means

4 Sibel Edmonds, *Classified Woman: The Sibel Edmonds Story. A Memoir* (Alexandria, Virginia: Sibel Edmonds, 2012).

> challenging bureaucracies, which largely make up the state apparatus. And the military is a bureaucracy too. Hence my interest in bureaucracy. But until coming across your work, challenging the state and challenging bureaucracy seemed two separate areas of study. Your insight has united them!

After reading Weinstein's writings on bureaucracy, I looked for other analyses along the same line, ones that treated bureaucracy as akin to an authoritarian state and examined strategies to challenge it. There were a few academic articles about coups in organisations, but they didn't offer useful insights. And they didn't cite Weinstein's work, which I found peculiar. Well, it didn't surprise me that few academics were looking into bottom-up strategies for change.

Whistleblowers

Weinstein tells about two types of challenges to bureaucratic authority: by individuals and groups. Individual challengers are by far the most well-known. They are whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden.

Whistleblowers are insiders who speak out about corruption, abuses and dangers to the public. Most whistleblowers are loyal and conscientious employees who see a problem and report it to authorities, often their boss or higher management. Typically, they are not dissidents. Rather, they believe the system works, that the organisation operates on the principles it officially espouses. That's why they report problems internally. They expect management to look into their concerns and deal appropriately with any

problems. Many of them don't think of themselves as whistleblowers, and certainly not as dissidents. Often, they say, "I was just doing my job."

All too often, though, they are shocked. Rather than the problem being investigated and addressed, they come under attack. The methods are legion. Petty harassment is common: being given unwelcome duties, not being invited to meetings, having leave requests denied. Then there is ostracism, the cold shoulder: managers, and often co-workers, avoid contact, often because they fear being tainted by association and treated the same way. Ostracism may sound trivial, but it can have a big psychological impact, because social interactions are one of the important satisfactions of work. Some reprisals are brutal this way: being reassigned to an office away from others, with no duties and no equipment. It's like exile from the community.

Also common is rumour-mongering, with managers and others making hints about mental illness, sexual deviance, theft and incompetence. Then there are private or public denunciations, for example, being slandered and ridiculed at a staff meeting. Many workers are instructed to see psychiatrists, which sends a message to co-workers that they are mentally unstable; if they refuse, they can be charged with disobeying orders. In some cases, managers rely on "hired gun" psychiatrists who certify the worker as mentally ill so they can be dismissed.

Other methods include punitive transfers (to undesired locations or jobs), demotions and dismissals. For some,

there is blacklisting: not being able to get another job in the field.[5]

Collective challenges

Sometimes, groups of workers get together and mount challenges to top management. The obvious example is trade unions, which are organisations intended to advance the interests of workers. Unions can be effective in controlling abuses. However, most unions focus on improving wages and working conditions. They seldom go beyond this to question the system of power in bureaucratic workplaces.

Historically, some unions have pushed for greater participation in organisational decision-making. In one form of what's called industrial democracy, worker representatives sit on the board of management. Then there are more radical alternatives in which bureaucracy is replaced with a system without bosses, in which workers collectively make decisions about what to produce, how to do the work, and how workers are paid. This is called workers' control or workers' self-management. We'll come back to what happens to such initiatives.

5 There are many excellent treatments of whistleblowing, including C. Fred Alford, *Whistleblowers: Broken Lives and Organizational Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Myron Peretz Glazer and Penina Migdal Glazer, *The Whistleblowers: Exposing Corruption in Government and* Industry (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Kate Kenny, *Regulators of Last Resort: Whistleblowers, the Limits of the Law and the Power of Partnerships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024); Tom Mueller, *Crisis of Conscience: Whistleblowing in an Age of Fraud* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019).

Weinstein's focus was on bureaucratic opposition, on challenges from below to those running bureaucracies. However, there's something else we can learn from her analysis. Lessons from bureaucratic opposition can be applied to opposition to authoritarian states, and perhaps to states more generally.

One connection is straightforward. A whistleblower in an organisation is like a dissident in a repressive regime. Neither one has much of a chance of making a difference. Whistleblowers are likely to be ignored or, if their claims might influence others, slandered, harassed and expelled. Whistleblower protection laws and policies seem to make little difference — they give only an appearance of justice.

The similarity to repressive regimes is striking. Dissidents might be ignored but sometimes are attacked. This might mean they lose their jobs or privileges like housing. It might mean worse things, like arrest, imprisonment, torture and murder. This is worse than what usually happens to whistleblowers, but the reaction is the same: "shoot the messenger," in other words attack the person revealing problems.

Many repressive regimes have constitutions guaranteeing freedoms and rights. In practice, these constitutional protections are meaningless. They are just like the false promises of whistleblower protection laws.

Brand controls

In 2024, Josh Bornstein's book *Working for the Brand* appeared. Bornstein, an Australian lawyer, has represented many clients, defending their free speech. According to Bornstein, workers are muzzled on the job, but it's even

worse: now they can be dismissed because of their speech outside the workplace.[6]

Here's a typical scenario. Someone makes a comment on social media, for example critical of military celebrations. Right-wing media decide to attack, encouraging readers and viewers to complain. There is a huge social media pile-on, and complaints to the person's employer.

In some cases, the employer stands by their employee, but in others they don't. Here's the clincher. Employment contracts now commonly include clauses saying workers are not allowed to bring their employer into disrepute. But that's now happened as a result of the social media post.

Companies are sensitive to threats to their brands. Think of brands like Coca-Cola and Toyota. McDonald's has long been incredibly protective of its brand, even suing family restaurants whose owners were named McDonald and used the McDonald's name. After a small activist group distributed a leaflet critical of McDonald's, the company hired private investigators to infiltrate the group and collect evidence, and then sued members of the group for defamation. However, this legal action, the now-famous McLibel case, backfired on the company.[7]

The McLibel case was before the rise of social media. Today, companies prepare for threats to their brands by requiring their workers to sign contracts, as noted. The employment contracts are so vague that it's impossible to know for sure what is safe to say. This leads to workers being afraid to say anything. They censor themselves.

Weinstein argued that bureaucracies are like authoritarian states. According to Bornstein, this now seems even more true, in that corporate employers can exert power over workers even when they're not on the job.

6 Josh Bornstein, *Working for the Brand: How Corporations Are Destroying Free Speech* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2024).

7 John Vidal, *McLibel* (London: Macmillan, 1997).

Anti-regime or anti-state

One of the most promising options for challenging bureaucratic power comes via challenges to repressive states. If, as Weinstein argues, bureaucracies are like authoritarian states, then we should be able to learn from anti-regime movements. And there have been a lot of them. In 1944, an unarmed popular uprising toppled the dictatorship in Guatemala. In 1986, it happened in the Philippines. In 2000, in Serbia. These are just a few of dozens of cases.[8]

The methods of nonviolent action used to topple repressive regimes provide a toolkit for challenging bureaucratic elites. This approach seemed promising, but I struggled to find a suitable case study. Researchers can study popular uprisings in Guatemala, Philippines, Serbia and elsewhere because there's a wealth of public information. Not so for bureaucratic struggles. Activity inside organisations is seldom documented. Insiders know a lot, but it's tricky to write about recent struggles because the players are still alive, and might sue for defamation. Whatever the reason, nonviolence researchers haven't yet turned their attention to organisational struggles.

8 This is discussed in the chapter on violence.

Conclusion

Weinstein's analysis of bureaucratic organisations as akin to authoritarian states is highly useful. It means there is a common obstacle to challenges: hierarchy, including managerial control. It means that anti-state activists can learn from struggles inside bureaucratic organisations, and organisational activists can learn from anti-state campaigns.

So far, neither of these challenges has had much success. States remain the dominant way of organising life within countries, and bureaucracies remain the dominant way of organising work.

Workers' organisations are an obvious basis for resistance, but what about when trade unions focus on wages and conditions, posing no threat to the system of hierarchy? Are there examples of organisational resistance that can be used to provide guidance for challengers? What methods for challenging repressive regimes can be imported into organisational struggles?

Maybe trying to challenge massive bureaucracies from within is a lost cause. The fate of whistleblowers might be a warning: reform is seemingly hopeless, and if so, organisational revolution is even more hopeless. On the other hand, there are many examples of workers being able to take over, running factories without bosses, but are there any examples where anything like this has happened with a high-tech company like Google? Maybe it's better to build alternatives.

Anarchists have long focused on the state as a source of oppression, giving less attention to a key component of the state: bureaucracy as a way of organising work. As well, the bureaucratic form is widely used in non-state organisations. Furthermore, bureaucracy has important similarities to the state. There are many reasons for anarchists to pay attention to ways to challenge bureaucracy.

3
Experts

What would Bakunin say about the way governments responded to the Covid pandemic?

We will never know. Mikhail Bakunin lived from 1814 to 1876. He is one of the most prominent classical anarchists, whose ideas are still discussed today. He was a colourful and complex figure, a rebel, plotter, enemy of governments, leader of the European socialist movement of his time, and central rival to Karl Marx.

I first read some of Bakunin's writings in the 1970s. I was especially interested in what he had to say about science, because at the time I was doing my PhD in theoretical physics.

Bakunin was not an organised writer. He wrote lots of things but didn't put them into a coherent whole. This was unlike his rival Marx, who produced many works that systematically presented his ideas.

I found a collection of Bakunin's writings edited by Sam Dolgoff, and turned to a few pages under the title "Authority and science." They were enough to stimulate my interest.

Bakunin wrote about science in an abstract, general way. He started by saying that humans are bound by "natural laws," and that once these laws are recognised, people *should* follow them.

In reading Bakunin, it's important to recognise that when he refers to "men," he meant humans, and when he refers to "science," it includes what today we would call social science. Accordingly, natural laws include laws about both nature and human society.

Here's a passage that appealed to me.

> Suppose a learned academy, composed of the most illustrious scientists, were charged with the lawful organization of society, and that, inspired only by the purest love for truth, it framed only laws in absolute harmony with the latest discoveries of science. Such legislation, I say, and such organization would be a monstrosity …[1]

Bakunin often used colourful language. He concluded this passage by saying that by requiring people to conform to the latest scientific findings, "we should condemn society as well as individuals to suffer martyrdom on a Procrustean bed."[2]

Bakunin's view contrasted with that of those who saw Marxism as a science of society, with capitalism inevitably giving way to socialism.

Bakunin gave three reasons why rule by scientists would be "a monstrosity." The first is that science,

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1 *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-founder of World Anarchism,* edited by Sam Dolgoff (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), p. 227.

2 According to fable, the robber Procrustes forced victims onto an iron bed, stretching them or cutting off their legs so they would fit exactly to its size.

especially scientific findings about humans, is always imperfect. Secondly, people should not submit to any form of rule they do not understand: they should not "venerate" laws based on science. Thirdly, power tends to corrupt: "… a scientific academy invested with absolute sovereignty, even if it were composed of the most illustrious men, would infallibly and soon end in its own moral and intellectual corruption."[3]

Bakunin goes on to say that, when it comes to making boots, he would defer to the expertise of the bootmaker, and likewise for other areas of expertise. He makes the point that no one is infallible, so in any domain it is sensible to consult several experts, obtaining different opinions. He summarises his argument:

> In a word, we reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal powers over us, even though arising from universal suffrage, convinced that this can serve only to the advantage of a dominant minority of exploiters against the interests of the immense majority in subjection to them. This is the sense in which we are all anarchists …[4]

How would have Bakunin reacted to measures imposed to control Covid, such as lockdowns, mask requirements and vaccine mandates? These were imposed by governments invoking the authority of science. Consider the three reasons Bakunin gave for rejecting rule by experts. The first

3 Ibid., p. 228.

4 Ibid., p. 231.

was that science is always imperfect. That certainly applies to the science behind Covid-control measures. For example, US schools were closed long after evidence was available that they posed minimal danger of spreading Covid to either students or teachers. Public health experts and politicians claimed to follow "the science," but they relied unduly on information that supported their recommendations.[5]

However, Bakunin's arguments don't end there. His second reason was that people shouldn't submit to any form of rule they don't understand. This is a tall order when it comes to the science used to justify lockdowns and vaccine mandates, given the role of epidemiology and virology. Most people simply accepted the word of scientists and politicians and followed their advice and mandates. Bakunin, presumably, would have been among the resisters to official controls. But perhaps not. It was easy enough to understand some of the thinking behind controlling the virus, such as vulnerable people keeping away from crowds where they might be infected. Perhaps Bakunin would have thought it was fine for some people, those who were well informed, to follow advice they understood.

Bakunin's third reason was that power tends to corrupt. This is an important idea, most famously associated with a saying by Lord Acton: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Acton, who lived from 1834 to 1902, was certainly no anarchist, but his saying is

5 David Zweig, *An Abundance of Caution: American Schools, the Virus, and a Story of Bad Decisions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2025).

relevant. This topic is so important that I've addressed it in a separate chapter.

During the Covid pandemic, most governments asserted their power. Can we say that it corrupted politicians or scientists? Perhaps so, by noting that emergency powers were invoked and, more tellingly, dissident voices were suppressed. Doctors who questioned vaccines or who promoted treatments using cheap repurposed drugs were censored, and some lost their jobs.[6] Whatever the rights and wrongs of Covid policy, in other words regardless of whether Covid dissidents were correct, suppressing them and preventing an open debate involves the exercise of power by or on behalf of dominant groups.

Does this represent power corrupting? Not necessarily. A more detailed investigation would be needed.

The control of technology

For a long time, I've been interested in the role of experts in society. This curiosity crystallised in the late 1970s. In Australia, the most important environmental issue was uranium mining and nuclear power. Australia has large reserves of uranium, the fuel for nuclear power, but nuclear power has never been economically competitive for producing electricity because of Australia's large reserves of coal. Nonetheless, there was a push to introduce nuclear power plants, which would have been a path to Australian nuclear weapons. There was much more to the debate.

6 Mitchell Liester et al., "A narrative review of the COVID-19 infodemic and censorship in healthcare," *Secrecy and Society,* vol. 3, no. 2, 2025.

Suffice it to say that I was involved in the anti-uranium movement — and this meant coming up against two prominent pro-nuclear experts, Philip Baxter and Ernest Titterton. They were called Sir Philip and Sir Ernest, having been knighted by the Australian government.

Baxter was head of the Australian Atomic Energy Commission and Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales. Titterton was professor of nuclear physics at the Australian National University, which is where I worked as a research assistant, a junior position. During World War II, Baxter and Titterton had each worked with British teams supporting the nuclear bomb project. They were seen as nuclear experts and hence as having great credibility in the nuclear debate. Those of us in the anti-uranium movement had to deal with these two nuclear knights.

As a consequence, I was on the lookout for analyses of experts. One of the best books I found was titled *The Control of Technology,* by David and Ruth Elliott, radical British activists. They examined arguments concerning technocracy, which means rule by technical experts, otherwise known as technocrats. The Elliotts examined four models of technocracy. The first was benevolent technocrats, who either ruled society or were a force for good. The second was that technocrats were a self-interested elite group. The third was that technocrats were servants of power, namely serving the interests of capitalist elites. The fourth was that technocracy was an uncontrolled malevolent force.[7]

7 David Elliott and Ruth Elliott, *The Control of Technology* (London: Wykeham, 1976).

To see how these different models might apply, consider technology used for surveillance, including security cameras, facial recognition, keystroke loggers, and social media analysis. A wide range of technical experts have been involved in developing, applying and using these tools. Used in the workplace, they commonly serve to control workers, though occasionally they can serve as protection. Used for policing, they commonly serve to track down criminals — and protesters. Which model of technocracy best applies to surveillance experts?

First, benevolent technocrats: this doesn't fit the use of surveillance technology against workers or protesters. Second, technocrats as a self-interested elite: although surveillance technology experts can obtain good jobs, the technology does not seem designed to put them in positions of power. Third, technocrats as servants of power: this seems to fit, with surveillance technology serving employers and police, who are not technical experts themselves. Fourth, technology as an uncontrolled malevolent force: this might seem to be the case, with the proliferation of security cameras and monitoring of phones, but can it be said that this is uncontrolled? Many of these technologies are the result of massive investments in design, production and sales. It's possible to imagine different designs and different uses to serve human needs in a differently organised society. For example, surveillance might be under the control of workers and citizens, and used primarily for protection of the vulnerable and monitoring of those who might harm them.

Servants of power

If, as the Elliotts argued, the most useful way to think about technocracy is that experts are servants of power, then how does that operate? One important element is that their jobs and status depend on being "servants" in one way or another, as employees, advisors or public commentators. If you're employed by a corporation or government, it's obvious enough that to get ahead you need to adhere to your employer's line. If you criticise the decisions of top management, you could be harassed, marginalised or dismissed. If you work for a pharmaceutical company, it pays to keep your head down and do what bosses request — even when it means doing research that conveniently comes up supporting the company's products and ghost-writing articles for publication in medical journals.[8]

Then there are external advisors, for example lawyers, engineers or medical researchers contracted to provide services to powerful clients. These experts may be independent in a legal sense but still dependent on the good graces of powerful groups, and they are unlikely to thrive if they persistently go against these clients. When a large mining company needs to provide a legally mandated environmental impact assessment before proceeding with a major project, it can turn to consultants. Guess what? Consultants who don't come up with a report serving the company are unlikely to be asked again for their services. Another sort of expert, auditors, need to keep their clients happy. When the energy company Enron collapsed in a

8 For example, Sergio Sismondo, *Ghost-managed Medicine: Big Pharma's Invisible Hands* (Manchester: Mattering Press, 2018).

mass of fraud, it took down its auditor, the firm Arthur Andersen, which had signed off on the company's accounts.

What about universities? They are supposed to be independent. Academic scientists can study whatever they like. At least that's the idea with academic freedom. Academics should be able to research and teach without fear or favour.

To some extent, this is true. There are many scholars who set their own agendas, pursuing research in the public interest and teaching accordingly. But it's not always easy.

One big influence is research grants. Many university scientists rely on external grants to run their labs, purchase equipment and employ PhD students and post-doctoral fellows. The competition for grants is intense. Some scientists turn to the corporate sector for funding, others to governments. Militaries are important sponsors for academic research.

There's another influence. The important questions in any field can be shaped by funding. For example, chemical companies provide funding for research on pesticides, but there's no equivalent source of funding for organic farming. As a result, key questions in the field are about industrial, pesticide-based agriculture, which makes it hard for those following a different agenda to be published and gain a reputation, indeed to have a viable career.

Does funding really make such a difference? Surely a scientist can follow the evidence, publishing what they find, even if it goes against what the funding body might like. Maybe so in principle, but not in practice. There's

something called the "funding effect."[9] A researcher with funding from a company is much more likely to come up with results supporting the company's products than another researcher, with independent funding, studying exactly the same topic.

In these ways, powerful groups — especially governments and corporations — shape research agendas, not just for the researchers they directly employ, but also for academics. It doesn't mean total control, though, because in some fields it's possible to do research with little or no funding. For a historian, for example, all that may be needed is time and access to archival sources. Sometimes it may be necessary to travel to archives, but with more material now available online, the key requirement becomes time. Nevertheless, even in fields and topics for which external funding is not so important, researchers can feel constrained. And for many, the biggest constraint is peer expectations, namely what others in the same field are doing — and how they are doing it. Most academics write for other academics, in a special style suited for scholars. The result is that scholarly publications, even when the content is radical, are unappealing to anyone outside the field. This is a big topic. The bottom line is that, in many cases, academic experts mainly serve each other.

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9 Sheldon Krimsky, *Conflicts of Interest in Science: How Corporate-funded Academic Research Can Threaten Public Health* (New York: Hot Books, 2019).

Ideological discipline and assignable curiosity

Let me turn to another question. Why are so many scientists and engineers willing to use their skills to make technological systems for killing and repression? Some of them build and maintain nuclear, chemical and biological weapons — so-called weapons of mass destruction — as well as "conventional" weapons, using chemical explosives, which are capable of large-scale destruction. Then there are the scientists who design surveillance systems, early warning systems, and all sorts of weapons systems, from rifles to intercontinental ballistic missiles. There are psychologists who figure out how to maintain solidarity in fighting groups and how to use torture for interrogation. I could go on. The point is that large numbers of technical experts lend their skills to the war machine. Why are they willing to do this?

For an answer, turn to the path-breaking book *Disciplined Minds,* by Jeff Schmidt.[10] Schmidt had personal experience as a teacher, but more influential in his thinking was doing a PhD in physics and working for 19 years as an editor for the professional magazine *Physics Today.* In his book, Schmidt provocatively wrote on page 1, "This book is stolen. Written in part on stolen time, that is." By this, he meant that he spent part of his work time writing the book. This provoked his employers. They fired him.

That was enough to make me want to read his book. And another thing: I also had a PhD in physics. Jeff and I shared a professional background.

10 Jeff Schmidt, *Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System that Shapes their Lives* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

Disciplined Minds is about all professions, and is relevant to teachers, lawyers, accountants, engineers, police, indeed any occupational group in which training and credentials are required for entry. The disciplining that Schmidt talks about comes in two forms. The first he calls "ideological discipline," which is acquiescence to the standard ideas within a profession. Teachers, for example, expect to run classes themselves, and are unlikely to encourage students to deviate from the curriculum.

The second form of discipline is the development of what Schmidt calls "assignable curiosity." Rather than pursuing their own questions, individually or collectively, students learn to turn their curiosity towards whatever questions are presented to them. For example, a good student, to prepare for an exam, needs to figure out what the teacher, or exam-setter, is likely to ask and what sort of answer will satisfy them. The hidden side of exams is learning how to please whoever sets the agenda. Assignable curiosity is just what is needed by experts serving the military. They are given a technical challenge and work hard to find solutions, not questioning the overall goals of the organisation.

Richard Falk, public intellectual

Another role for an expert is as a public commentator. Think of the Covid pandemic, when governments imposed lockdowns, distancing rules, masking requirements and vaccination mandates. Few of the government leaders who presented these policies to the public were themselves technical experts, such as virologists or epidemiologists.

Still, quite a few technical experts wrote articles and gave talks backing the government line.

Experts as public commentators — couldn't they be independent? The trouble is, to become taken seriously, most experts need to adhere to official policy. It's an unusual expert who consistently challenges the dominant view. Think for example of military policy. It is hard to think of a single figure who questions government policy on national security, from a peace perspective, and who is given prime billing in the mainstream media. In the US, the closest example would be Noam Chomsky, the famous linguist who became the intellectual scourge of the US government during the Vietnam War, and a hero in left-wing circles. But soon after, he was marginalised. His path-breaking book *The Political Economy of Human Rights,* co-authored with Edward Herman, was a target for suppression.

For insights about the difficulties faced by public intellectuals who challenge dominant views, it's useful to turn to Richard Falk, a US international relations scholar, an expert on international law, who over a long career consistently supported human rights. Born in 1930, he obtained public prominence due to his criticism of the Vietnam war. In his autobiography, *Public Intellectual,* he tells of being marginalised when he was no longer seen as sufficiently close to the mainstream and its loyal opposition.

In his experience, few US academics encourage participation in public life. Even when they have liberal views, they behave in a cautious, conservative way, supporting the quest for elite status. "It has been disillusioning for me over the years to acknowledge that incredibly few in the academic community were willing to take even such minimal risks of public exposure. They preferred to express any controversial views they held in the private confines of cocktail parties or over afternoon coffee."[11]

Falk says that claims about using the merit principle in academia are misleading. "The real defining criterion of academic excellence is scholarly and political like-mindedness, often unconsciously exhibited."[12]

Chomsky and Howard Zinn, among others, could be "scorned" as being amateurs because they didn't have the right credentials. Chomsky was a linguist, without formal qualifications in politics and international relations. In contrast, Falk, because of his professional accomplishments, had to be overtly discredited, which was done by focusing on his "allegedly utopian or contrarian attitudes."[13]

Falk says that during the Vietnam war it was okay to say that the war was a mistake, but not to say that international law should take precedence or that war policy should be rejected because of its human costs (on the Vietnamese) or the criminal nature of the war. "Criticisms of policy became quite acceptable, while criticisms of underlying structures of sovereign authority and militarism were not."[14]

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11 Richard Falk, *Public Intellectual: The Life of a Citizen Pilgrim* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 2021), p. 78.

12 Ibid., p. 109.

13 Ibid., p. 126.

14 Ibid., p. 398.

Falk's marginalisation was accelerated when he took up human rights issues in Israel-Palestine. His comments about universities are revealing.

> I have become quite aware of Zionist militants going back stage at North American and European universities to blacklist faculty appointments, cancel conferences, and discredit speakers thought to be critical of Israel. Such critics are charged with anti-Semitism and those exerting pressure will often threaten the university with bad publicity and withholding of contributions to the university and its programs. Pressure is applied to block or cancel academic appointments and scheduled events including invited lectures and even large conferences. My personal experience suggests that these underhanded tactics often succeed because bureaucrats and university officials, almost without exception, are team players with concerns about what their administrative superiors would wish, and fear controversy and the kind of exposure that accompanies it, especially if negative funding implications are involved. Better safe than sorry.
>
> True, more established, affluent universities are usually more self-confident, and fend off irresponsible critics and community pressures, including influence peddlers and rich donors, with gracious brushoffs like, 'I wish I could help, but academic freedom is valued in this place even for viewpoints that many of us detest.' Usually that is the end of it, although not really, as quietly, yet corrosively, the word goes forth to deans and department chairs that it is best to avoid events and speakers that are seen as controversial and provocative, making the typical liberal defense of academic freedom often a structural threat to the openness of debate and dialogue. I have found that many university administrators make a show of defending academic freedom in public while undermining or circumscribing such freedom in private, or indirectly, by pompously invoking considerations of civility and institutional decorum, and more concretely, by claiming an absence of funding as the reason to reject controversial conference proposals or invited faculty lectures. There is no way of counting how many controversial speakers are not invited or controversial younger faculty not promoted or appointed. Tacit forms of thought control and employment denials are far more insidious and certainly more prevalent than overt and crude forms.[15]

Recap

We've come a long way from Bakunin. He said that by requiring people to conform to the latest scientific findings, "we should condemn society as well as individuals to suffer martyrdom on a Procrustean bed." This can be interpreted, in contemporary terms, as opposing rule by scientific mandates. This would apply both to topics like the Covid pandemic, when the mandates came from medical experts, and areas like politics where, conceivably, mandates could come from political experts. And who might be these political experts? Surely not political scientists, who mainly study politics but have little influence. Perhaps Bakunin was thinking of people like Karl Marx, whose followers treated his doctrines as a scientific analysis of society.

Bakunin's comments were general, and can be interpreted in various ways. Nevertheless, they can stimulate thinking. David and Ruth Elliott in *The Control of Technology* found the most convincing explanation for the role of experts is that they are servants of power. There are plenty

15 Ibid., pp. 81–82.

of examples of how scientists, technologists and other experts do the bidding of their employers.

Why is this so common? Jeff Schmidt in *Disciplined Minds* examined the training of experts, including the process of assignable curiosity. In school and university, students learn to study whatever questions their teachers and supervisors present to them. This is good preparation for taking on jobs where they do whatever their bosses decide. This helps explain why highly talented graduates can be willing to develop marketing strategies for tobacco companies and deadly weapons for the military.

This sounds gloomy, but the processes examined by the Elliotts and Schmidt don't work for everyone. There are dissidents in all fields. A few tobacco company employees have become whistleblowers, and some nuclear experts have campaigned against nuclear weapons. But it's not easy being a dissident, and if you want to make a name for yourself in public commentary, becoming a public intellectual, there are strong pressures to stay within prevailing limits.

What would Bakunin say about this? I suspect he would be amazed by developments in science, and that he would search for ways to make sense of them according to the anarchist principles he espoused. But that search wouldn't be easy. As I've said, Bakunin's analysis was general, whereas how to apply general principles to specific issues like AI, climate change, less-lethal weapons, pandemics, social media and facial recognition is not always straightforward. Bakunin's ideas can be used as inspiration, but there are plenty of challenges. One of them is the role of experts in a free society.

Dilemmas

Imagine a free society, the realisation of anarchy. How would decisions be made about complex issues involving scientific expertise? What about a looming pandemic? What about routine vaccinations?

The simple answer is that responses would be developed collectively, respecting independent expertise but recognising that specialist knowledge does not give authority to make decisions. Noble-sounding, indeed! But not very practical.

One option is setting up policy juries of randomly selected community members who would listen to a range of viewpoints, deliberate and make recommendations. Policy juries are used today to look at controversial issues like euthanasia and climate change, but political leaders only occasionally pay attention. The difference in an anarchist community is that there are no political leaders, none at least with the power to impose decisions, so a policy jury's recommendations would only affect behaviour through their persuasiveness. Interesting, but is this anything more than speculation?[16]

A different challenge is what to do about experts today. What should an anarchist do when there's a dominant view on, say, guns or vaccination or cancer, and a dissident view supported by a few experts? One response is to say, well, let's investigate and get to the bottom of the issue. The trouble is that it's incredibly difficult to get to the bottom. Consider cancer. There's prevention, and the argument that more should be done about prevention compared to cure.

16 See the chapter on self-management.

But even with the optimal prevention, some people will get cancer, and then what? One step is to study treatments, both conventional ones including surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy, and unconventional ones. However, the answers may depend on which cancer is involved and on emerging research. How much money and resources should be invested in the different treatment options? Getting to the bottom is turning into an endless quest. It's a dilemma. You might become an expert, but even experts don't know everything, and if you know a lot and think you have the answers, how can you convince others?

So imagine this. You have become an expert in a particular area through years of study and practical experience — and you're committed to egalitarian politics, to encouraging others to be involved in decision-making. You might be an expert on preventive health, transport, energy or decision-making. Next, two scenarios. First, you support the most popular choice, the one backed by other experts and most others too. Easy? Not if you recognise that there are dissident views, held by a small minority, that aren't getting a fair hearing. Should you just ignore the dissidents, or become a devil's advocate, backing the dissidents to make sure their views are considered?

Second, you're one of the dissidents, and you feel unfairly marginalised. You see the group making an unwise choice because they're following the conventional path. What should you do? Just acquiesce and go along with the flow, and wait for others to see the consequences of their unwise decision? Continue agitating after decisions are made? Seek to engage with others to persuade them?

These sorts of challenges face anarchists today. Pandemic responses, whether to use violence, how to promote the cause, whether to expel or ostracise a disruptive member — all sorts of issues can generate passionate feelings and lead to disastrous outcomes. When you have in-depth knowledge and long experience, what should you do?

4
Groups

I remember my first nonviolence workshop. It was in 1977, when nonviolence ideas were just being introduced in Canberra. I can't remember how many people attended the two-day workshop; maybe a dozen. We were all involved in activism, in my case the anti-uranium movement.

The workshop involved getting-to-know-you activities, discussions of issues, information about preparing for action, and group dynamics exercises. If your group was going to take direct action — especially in a serious action when you might be arrested — then you needed to prepare. You needed to know how to respond to police. You needed to know how your group would make decisions, routinely and in tense situations, like when police demanded that everyone disperse. Trust was vital.

I wasn't planning on doing anything where I might be arrested, but perhaps others were. In any case, it was fascinating. Here were ideas about how to live together in a different way, seeking social change while refusing to use physical violence.

The facilitator for our workshop was Peter Jones, an experienced activist who read widely and was in touch with groups around the world. That was not common back then,

before the Internet and cheap communication. We were all there voluntarily; no one was paid, including Peter.[1]

At that workshop, or later ones, I learned about several techniques to help groups work together more harmoniously and productively. Some of them were intended to enable everyone to have an opportunity to speak. An easy one is introducing ourselves, even when we know each other, for example by giving our name and our favourite animal or colour or song. Another introduction exercise has everyone pairing off and talking with their partner for a couple of minutes, and then each person introduces their partner to the group.

Then there are exercises to help achieve a more balanced discussion, so no one dominates, and no one is left out. As we sat in a circle, we were each given five toothpicks. Each time I spoke, I had to put one of my toothpicks in the centre of the circle, and likewise for each of the others. When anyone ran out of toothpicks, they weren't supposed to say anything further. People became more aware of who was speaking, who was dominating the conversation and who was keeping quiet. Those who usually spoke a lot were constrained, and those who wanted the last word had to hold their tongues while others spoke.

Another technique required each speaker in a group to summarise what the previous speaker said, to their satisfaction, before making their own comment. Mary just made a statement. If I wanted to respond, first I had to summarise

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1 Peter drew on his experiences to write "Nonviolent action training: a South Pacific perspective," *Social Alternatives,* vol. 1, nos. 6/7, 1980, pp. 130–133.

Mary's statement. If she nodded that my summary was all right, I could respond to it. Or maybe she shook her head, restated her comments and asked me to try again. This sounds cumbersome, and it is, but it's really effective in getting people to listen. Often, talkative group members concentrate so much on what they're planning to say that they don't pay attention to what others are saying. When you have to summarise what the previous speaker said, you really have to listen.

In some groups, we'd assign someone to be a devil's advocate, who had to give arguments against whatever view or decision the majority seemed to be supporting. A devil's advocate serves as a protection against not considering all perspectives and against bandwagon effects, when members support something just because everyone else does.

A crucial role in group discussions is the facilitator. This is different from a chairperson, who runs the meeting. A facilitator aims to help the group function effectively, by ensuring that everyone has a chance to participate, checking whether everyone agrees with a decision, keeping confident and dominating individuals under control, keeping the discussion on track, and continually checking that the process is all right. One of the challenges for facilitators is not to become too engrossed in making their own contributions to the topic under discussion.

In large groups, there can be two or more facilitators. Sometimes, it's better for an outsider to facilitate, someone who has no stake in the group or its decisions, except to help the group be more effective. Facilitation is a crucially important skill, so it's good if many group members learn how to do it. One way is learning by doing. In a small group,

each member can be given an opportunity to be the facilitator. For larger-group facilitation, an experienced facilitator can be a mentor for someone with less experience.

To learn about how we related to each other, and beyond, we used role plays. In one of them, called the fishbowl, the facilitator prepares three or four members of the group to pretend they were having a discussion or conducting an interview, with some of them separately instructed to be awkward, difficult or distracted. They are the "fish." The actual role play of the interaction lasts for just a few minutes. The other members sit in a circle around those in the centre. They are the "bowl." The facilitator prepares them to look for what is said, or who speaks to whom, or body language: each person in the bowl has a specific watching task. After the brief role play is over, the facilitator asks each individual in the centre, the fish, to tell everyone how they felt in their role, and each person in the bowl to say what they observed. The fishbowl exercise helps everyone involved to pay more attention to interpersonal interactions.

Another role play we used is called the hassle line. Participants get into two lines, each person facing one other. The facilitator asks those in one line to pretend to be police officers and those in the other to be demonstrators, who approach the officer trying to be friendly and build a connection. Then everyone starts their interactions simultaneously, just for a minute or so. Afterwards, the ones pretending to be police tell their counterparts how well they did in opening up a conversation. Then the facilitator asks everyone in one line to shift one person down, and the process is repeated, with roles reversed. The hassle line can

be adapted to a variety of one-on-one verbal interactions, including ones on a pretend telephone. It's a way to get quick feedback on how to present yourself to others. Surprisingly, many people never receive feedback on their personal style, and can continue for years without anyone telling them how to improve.

Another role play was to prepare for street speaking: standing on a street corner speaking loudly to passers-by about a current issue, such as military spending. For many people, this sounds frightening. To prepare, we worked in pairs to plan what we would say, then practised speaking before our partners. Then each pair joined with another and we went through the same practice, this time before three others in our group of four. After doing this repeatedly until the facilitator thought we were ready, off we went to a street corner to preach to people in the street. The preparation, the role plays and the mutual support made it possible to do something almost unthinkable just a couple of hours before.

Another technique that I saw work well involved brainstorms. A facilitator led a large group, of 15 or 20, in a process to develop an action plan for the next year. To begin, there was a brainstorm in which everyone yelled out areas of importance to be addressed. After this process was exhausted, the facilitator asked for suggestions on consolidating and grouping the various items on the list. The result was a list of areas for action, such as media, training, outreach, writing and so forth. How could action plans be formulated for each of these? Here's the neat part. The facilitator invited individuals to join a subgroup on one of the topics, whichever one they preferred to work on. Some subgroups were just two or three people, others larger. If no one chose a topic, it was simply not addressed. Each subgroup was given a time to come up with a plan for its area, and write it out on large pieces of paper. Then everyone rejoined the full group and heard reports from each subgroup. Amazingly, everyone was happy with what other subgroups had come up with. This was a lot easier than trying to formulate plans by hashing everything out in the full group.[2]

I was impressed by the techniques I learned in nonviolent action training, and I learned about other techniques by reading about them. Years later, when I became a university teacher, I tried them out in the tutorials in my classes, to prepare students for going out and doing interviews. This was a case of taking activist methods into the academic environment. There are also many examples of activists adopting methods developed by researchers. There's a mutual fertilisation between these different domains, though one that is relatively undeveloped compared to military-academic and corporate-academic relations.

Movement for a New Society

In the 1970s and 1980s in the US, a group emerged called Movement for a New Society or MNS. Set up in 1971 as an outgrowth of the 1960s movements, it was a revolutionary project in the anarchist tradition, involving action against oppression ("oppose") and prefigurative personal and group behaviour ("propose"). MNS members lived

2 This process of allocating decision-making to separate groups has affinities with demarchy, discussed in the chapter on self-management.

communally, earned money in various ways but intended to be full-time radical activists as much as possible. They acquired houses in the same neighbourhood in Philadelphia and expanded to other cities, but the centres outside Philadelphia had a hard time sustaining themselves. MNS was most effective in introducing nonviolent action to numerous movements (most notably the anti-nuclear power movement, via the action at the Seabrook nuclear plant), waging campaigns, developing materials for study groups (using macroanalysis seminars), participating in cooperative enterprises and addressing their own oppressive behaviours.

MNS sought to ignite a nonviolent revolutionary movement in the US. But this turned out to be forlorn, especially in the 1980s with the resurgence of right-wing politics. MNS ended up dissolving itself in the late 1980s on the grounds that it was a white movement and that a truly revolutionary movement needed to be racially integrated. There was more to its demise, though.[3]

As its name suggests, members were trying to build an alternative. MNS was committed to equality: it opposed racial segregation, and some members had been campaigners in the US civil rights movement. It was committed to nonviolence, in the tradition of the civil rights movement, and committed to new ways of living and working together, without bosses or authorities.

3 Andrew Cornell, *Oppose and Propose! Lessons from Movement for a New Society* (Oakland, CA: AK Press; Washington, DC: Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2011).

I mainly knew about MNS through its publications, especially a wonderful activist manual called *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution*.[4] A few activists in Australia had connections with MNS and told us about it.

MNS is little known today. Yet it had a profound influence on future social movements, by spreading ideas about nonviolent action training. This included preparing for actions by being able to resist provocations from police or bystanders, learning how to cooperate in groups, and gaining an understanding of society, in particular systems of oppression.

This is a bit abstract. To work together in groups, MNS used various exercises or tools. One of them was consensus decision-making. Members of a group would discuss issues and try to reach a decision with which everyone could agree.

It's easiest to start with a small group, let's say seven people, who are part of an action occupying the site of a proposed nuclear power plant. The group members need to be prepared. What will they do if the police arrive and ask them to leave? Will they leave, walking away calmly? Will they refuse to leave? Will they resist arrest? Go limp to be carried away? These are important questions. Some group members may want to avoid arrest, due to family or financial obligations. Others may seek arrest to make a statement, as part of a solidarity action.

4 Coover, Ellen Deacon, Charles Esser and Christopher Moore, *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1981). It was available in various forms years earlier.

Imagine group members discussing options, trying to reach an agreement. If they succeed, fine. But if one member disagrees with all the others, this is called blocking consensus. It means they all have to rethink, seeking to address the blocker's objections, or, alternatively, finding a different way forward. At its best, this process stimulates creative solutions to challenging issues. The reason is that, much of the time, most people go along with the majority or with someone who seems to have experience and knowledge. The blocker serves the group by preventing premature agreement.

Now imagine a large protest, with dozens of these small affinity groups. After being given enough time to reach consensus in the small groups, each one sends a member — a spokesperson or spoke, not a representative or delegate — to a meeting, where all the spokes seek agreement. If they can't, they go back to their groups to try again.

It sounds impossibly complex and time-consuming. If just one person in a hundred, or in a thousand, blocks consensus, then the larger group can't move forward. Remarkably, in many cases, large groups can make important decisions using this method, and because everyone has agreed, or declined to block consensus, the unanimity and unity created is powerful indeed.

It is rare for someone to block consensus. Nevertheless, the larger the group, the more likely it is that someone will block consensus in an unconstructive way, for personal reasons or to serve some other agenda. Because of this, some movements adopt a form of modified consensus, for example overruling one or two blockers after a certain stage in the process. Experienced practitioners of consensus

decision-making become highly attuned to personal and group dynamics. The process works best when people know and trust each other, and the process helps people get to know and trust each other. Every decision-making procedure gets better with practice, as participants encounter problems and work out ways to overcome them.

Consensus decision-making is different from what is considered usual in formal settings, for example, the board of a business. Typically, a meeting is chaired by an individual who has the power of position, such as the chair of the board. The meeting is run according to an agenda circulated beforehand; minutes are taken by a secretary, and formal decisions are taken based on voting on motions proposed and amendments considered. This is the process following Robert's Rules of Order. It is familiar to anyone who has attended the annual general meeting of a bureaucratic organisation.

Consensus decision-making is also different from electoral politics, in which candidates run for office and are elected by voting according to a formula, such as that the candidate with the most votes wins, or candidates in a multi-member electorate win if their party receives a specified percentage of the vote. This is familiar in countries with elections, though not all elections are fair.

The advent of consensus decision-making in social movements represented a dramatic split from formal processes using voting. With consensus processes, there might be a "straw vote" to see whether anyone opposes a proposal, but a straw vote is not binding, and people can change their minds; discussion can continue, until consen-

sus is reached. When consensus is not reached, no decision is made, and the status quo is maintained.

Structurelessness?

In the early 1970s, a US feminist activist named Jo Freeman wrote an article titled "The tyranny of structurelessness."[5] It was a reaction to the rise of women's consciousness-raising groups, in which groups of women got together to talk about their experiences of oppression, discrimination and abuse. That was fine with Freeman, but she was concerned about the spread of a rejection of formal organisations, which she thought was not good for action or national coordination.

Freeman said that structure — namely ways of organising and coordinating activities in groups — could be either informal or formal. The problem with informal structure, in which no one is officially in charge, is that it leads to "elites," or networks of elites, who control groups. These elites could have power due to their experience, status, verbal skills or charisma, but because they weren't officially in charge, they couldn't be held accountable. As soon as groups moved to take action, there were likely to be internal power struggles.

Another problem is connections with the media. When no one is officially in charge, the media are likely to contact people who are well known. The result, Freeman said, was a star system.

5 Jo Freeman, "The tyranny of structurelessness," in Jane Jaquette (ed.), *Women in Politics* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), pp. 202–214. It has appeared elsewhere.

For these reasons, Freeman opposed what she called structurelessness. She contrasted it with "democratic structuring." This involves delegating specific authority to individuals. In other words, a group selects individuals to have particular roles, like chair and media liaison, and these individuals are responsible to those who selected them. Freeman said authority should be spread among several individuals, not invested in just one, and that group members should have the opportunity to take on different tasks, allocated on rational criteria. All members should have equal access to information and resources.

Even as Freeman wrote, her critique of structurelessness was becoming dated by the adoption of consensus decision-making by many groups. With consensus processes, no one is officially in charge, but there is plenty of structure to proceedings. Indeed, some critics of consensus decision-making complained about too much rigidity in the way processes were implemented.[6]

The trouble with Freeman's critique stemmed from her dichotomy of informal versus formal. What about methods that don't fit either of her models?

Types of democracy

Jane Mansbridge, a political scientist, investigated democratic decision-making. Like Freeman, she classified processes into two types, but in a different way. Mansbridge

6 For example, Howard Ryan, *Blocking Progress: Consensus Decision Making in the Anti-Nuclear Movement* (Berkeley: Overthrow Cluster, Livermore Action Group, 1985).

called them adversary and unitary democracy.[7] Adversary democracy is the familiar system of elections for representatives. It is "adversary" when elected representatives are cast as opponents, as in the US and other countries where there are two dominant political parties, each seeking power. This system is also called majoritarian: the candidate with the greatest number of votes, the majority, is elected.

The trouble with majoritarian systems is that groups that cannot attain a majority, for whatever reason, can be oppressed. This applies to specific issues. Consider an issue like abortion or medical care. The majority view of elected representatives will determine policy, and the arguments for different policies will be ignored or overruled.

Unitary democracy is Mansbridge's term for systems in which attempts are made to listen to everyone and to bring everyone together in an agreed outcome. Mansbridge studied a work collective, showing how reaching agreement occurred, including the influence of experienced and respected members. In some ways, this followed the lines of Freeman's critique of structurelessness.

Mansbridge also studied town meetings in the northeast region of the US called New England. Dozens of local residents could attend, and the meetings were run formally, according to protocol. But in practice, something different occurred. Rather than groups of residents combining to operate like de-facto political parties, the atmosphere was

7 Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

more inclusive, with those officially in charge listening and seeking consensus.

I've seen something similar in several organisations, for example board meetings of a disability support organisation. Officially, decisions were made by the formal process of making a motion, asking for a seconder to the motion, inviting amendments and voting on whether to accept them, and then voting on the motion. In practice, though, the process was informal, with discussion continuing until everyone seemed to agree, and then composing a motion to formalise what was agreed through a de-facto consensus process.

Consensus processes are especially important in any group seeking to harness the support of its active members. Adversarial processes can lead to those on the losing side giving lukewarm support to decisions made, or even leaving the group.

Consensus decision-making sounds worthwhile. The challenge is to scale the process up to larger groups. Could a version of consensus work with a community of thousands or millions? Thousands, perhaps, as shown by the New England town meetings. Millions — there are no examples yet.

Meanwhile, consensus processes have spread throughout social movements.

Problems in groups

Let's step back a bit and look at groups, starting with groups at work. You might be part of a work team or mainly work alone, doing what the boss asks. Anyway, you need to interact with others. Maybe you have an ideal work

situation, getting along with everyone, no clashes or problems, with everyone working at their best doing a good job. Dream on!

One of the most toxic aspects of workplace culture is bullying. The boss — it's most commonly the boss — singles out one subordinate for relentless criticism, always finding fault, and making demands that are hard to achieve. This can be about trivial-sounding sorts of things, like asking for a task to be redone because of a minor mistake. Or it could be assigning unrewarding duties or awkward shifts. It could mean being humiliated at a staff meeting.

Sometimes several workers join together in bullying a co-worker. This is called mobbing. It is devastating. It's also possible for bosses to be mobbed by a group of subordinates.

In 1999, I read several books about bullying at work, most of which had appeared just a few years earlier. One of them was titled *Work Abuse,* by Judith Wyatt and Chauncey Hare, who worked in San Francisco as psychologists. They specialised in supporting workers, and had a dim view of workplace dynamics, namely the way people related to each other on the job. They were quite aware of bullying but were concerned about something more pervasive. Even workers who weren't being bullied could feel inadequate because they weren't measuring up. They attributed much of the stress and angst at work to the emotion of shame.[8]

So how many workplaces are free of the sort of toxic shame that makes working life a misery? Corresponding

8 Judith Wyatt and Chauncey Hare, *Work Abuse: How to Recognize and Survive It* (Rochester, VT: Schenkman, 1997).

with Chauncey, he told me that he guessed 1 out of 20. In their view, very few workplaces in the US were beacons of enlightened or inspiring operations, where work was satisfying and personal relationships supportive. More common are jobs involving boring, repetitive, trivial tasks and rivalries, put-downs and harassment. Not a pretty picture. Few workplaces are so appealing that people will take a significant pay cut to get a job there or, if they are independently wealthy, work for no pay.

That's an indictment of workplaces, but maybe things are better in voluntary groups, without money and jobs being at stake. Think sporting clubs, church committees, cooking groups, bridge clubs, dancing … you name it. There are also voluntary activist groups, campaigning on climate, health, poverty and other issues. When people join together for mutual enjoyment, as in an amateur sporting club, or for a cause, as in a climate action group, there ought to be less abuse, less pursuit of power and status. Well, there ought to be, and maybe voluntary groups are more satisfying. After all, members are there because they want to be, which is more than can be said of many workplaces.

Nevertheless, not all voluntary groups are wonderful models of productive group synergy. Sometimes people rub each other the wrong way. They want to do things in a certain way, but others disagree. Someone wants to be the leader, official or de facto. Someone else tries to block decisions. Bullying can enter the scene.

If a voluntary group becomes unpleasant, why do members stay? After all, if participation is voluntary, why not just walk away and do something else? And that's just

what some do. But there's something else: loyalty and commitment.

Stay or leave?

In a classic book titled *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty,* Albert Hirschman examined a range of systems, looking at how people respond to problems.[9] Think of a customer at a coffee shop, who visits every day, asking for a favourite brew. Then one day, the taste is less attractive. The shop is using a different bean. What to do? Just accept the new taste? If there's another coffee shop down the street, one that has the customer's favourite, then it's easy to switch. This is what Hirschman calls "exit." It's very common among customers. If you become dissatisfied due to changes in your regular brand of breakfast cereal — the quality has dropped or the price increased — the easiest option is to switch to another brand.

In contrast, some customers, the most loyal ones, complain. They tell workers or write to the company, telling about their disappointment or demanding change. This is what Hirschman calls "voice."

If you've been working at the same job for ten or twenty years, you may have developed some loyalty to your employer, especially if you've risen in the ranks and have a position with prestige and responsibility. But then something happens that greatly disturbs you. It could be misbehaviour by senior management, corrupt actions or ill

9 Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organization, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

treatment of junior workers. What should you do? Look for another job or stay and try to address the problem? Exit or voice? The greater your loyalty, the more likely you'll choose voice. But it's a risky option. Unlike complaining about consumer products, complaining inside your workplace may lead to reprisals. If you become identified as a whistleblower, life is just about to become very difficult.

But what if you're involved in a voluntary group, a sporting club or a religious group? The longer you've been involved, and the more the group becomes part of your identity, the harder it is to leave. You're loyal. This is why long-standing group members are more likely to stick with it through difficult times, while newcomers find it easier to walk away.

This is part of the answer to the question: if a voluntary group becomes unpleasant, why do members stay? It's loyalty. And loyalty is often tied to commitment. If you're in a climate action group, you're concerned about global heating and want to do something about it. So you might be willing to put up with difficult times in your group, especially if there's no obvious alternative.

The sad truth is that many voluntary groups have all sorts of problems: members who try to take over, bullying, humiliation, warring factions, nasty interactions, toxic gossip, sexual exploitation, you name it. Every group? Not at all. But in too many groups, there's lots of unpleasantness or worse.

Often things seem worse, overall, than what happens day to day and week to week. That's because, for humans,

negatives outweigh positives.[10] One nasty comment can overshadow ten nice ones. So in most people's memories, a few clashes or dirty deeds are remembered far longer and vividly than the good times.

There's another factor: expectations. In many voluntary groups, members expect better. In a job, receiving a paycheque can compensate, to some extent, for putting up with boredom, anxiety or toxic interactions. In a voluntary group, money is less important. And there's commitment to a cause. In a climate group, members want to help save the world. Surely everyone will get along because we all agree on a noble goal! Alas, there can be all too many clashes over how to save the world, along with all the usual interpersonal difficulties. This is especially frustrating when you expect something better.

So, there are plenty of problems in groups. Are there any solutions? I've already told about nonviolent action training, which includes using techniques for facilitating meetings and consensus decision-making. Is there something more?

Liane

Liane Munro is an activist with decades of experience in various groups. She wanted to learn more about how

10 Roy F. Baumeister, Ellen Bratslavsky, Catrin Finkenauer and Kathleen D. Vohs, "Bad is stronger than good," *Review of General Psychology,* vol. 5, no. 4, 2001, pp. 323–370; Paul Rozin and Edward B. Royzman, "Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion," *Personality and Social Psychology Review,* vol. 5, no. 4, 2001, pp. 296–320.

activist groups can be more stable and effective, focusing on the internal dynamics of individuals and groups — the way members relate to themselves and each other. Liane is pursuing a PhD on this topic, under my supervision. I've learned a lot from her.[11]

Activist groups' activities are many and varied. To raise awareness of their concerns, they post information on social media, write letters, hold street stalls, lobby politicians, go door-to-door to talk with residents, give talks, and protest in the streets. However, much of this activity is invisible to outsiders, and it might seem that protest is what activists do, because most media coverage is about the more visible actions, especially violence and arrests. When do we ever learn about low-profile activism in Lebanon or Indonesia? There's lots of research on social movements, and much of it is about the most dramatic challenges, including mass protests with the potential to challenge the government.

Liane was interested in something mostly neglected by social movement scholars, and even neglected by activists: what goes on within small, voluntary activist groups, as they go about their day-to-day activities. And something else: what goes on in the minds of group members?

She focused on what's called "psychological flexibility." This refers to a set of six mental skills for managing thoughts and emotions, which are called self-as-context,

11 An initial publication: Liane Munro, "United we stand: fostering cohesion in activist groups," *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements,* vol. 13, no. 1, July 2021, pp. 129–156. Stay tuned for her PhD thesis.

present-moment awareness, acceptance, cognitive defusion, clarifying values, and committed action.[12] By cultivating these skills — by becoming aware of them and practising them — individual members can become better aware of their group's process and relationships and how to behave to help the group operate more smoothly and effectively, resolving conflicts productively and harnessing everyone's capacities more effectively. And they should make meetings more satisfying, so members are more likely to stick with the group. What's not to like?

However, it's not easy to research this. Liane's idea was to approach several activist groups, run a workshop for each one about psychological flexibility and survey the members before and after to see whether they thought the group was working better. It was more complicated than this, but that's the main idea. But it didn't turn out to be easy, because most groups are so focused on their current efforts that they don't feel they have the time to attend a workshop and do follow-up activities. Climate disaster is looming. Why get distracted by an outsider's research project that seems to have no immediate connection with current efforts?

Despite this, Liane found two groups willing to be involved in her research. But more important than the findings, her study shows the importance for activists of figuring out how to help make their groups more effective. This is crucial. Anyone with a lot of experience in activist

12 Steven C. Hayes, *A Liberated Mind: The Essential Guide to ACT. Transform Your Thinking & Find Freedom from Stress, Anxiety, Depression & Addiction* (London: Vermilion, 2019).

groups knows the challenges: disputes, power plays, misunderstandings, and shaming cause many members to drop out and make those remaining less effective than they could be.

Liane knew this through her decades of experience. In addition, she became active in Prosocial, a non-profit network of scientists and practitioners dedicated to supporting positive cultural change in groups and teams, and in this capacity met with members from across the globe.[13]

Liane told me about what she's observed in many contemporary groups: they are using creative techniques of group process to make decisions cooperatively, involve everyone, foster sharing of tasks, and generally build a more productive group culture. This is a long way down the track from formal systems, and a long way down the track from the tyranny of structurelessness. If activists are to have a better chance of success, they need to learn from experience, their own and that of generations before them, and to experiment with new ways of interacting. Liane's research is a contribution, but it seems there is a lot going on drawing on accumulated learning, in which activists try out methods knowing their goals and aware of some of the traps.

Carson

There's another place where group dynamics are especially important: decision-making groups. Around the world,

13 Paul W. B. Atkins, David Sloan Wilson and Steven C. Hayes, *Prosocial: Using Evolutionary Science to Build Productive, Equitable, and Collaborative Groups* (Oakland, CA: Context Press, 2019).

there have been hundreds of citizens juries and assemblies in which randomly selected members of the community are brought together to deliberate on a contentious issue, such as euthanasia, energy policy and toxic waste. Some groups meet for relatively short times, perhaps full-time for a few days; others meet less intensively over a longer period. Their deliberations are carried out with the help of trained facilitators whose task is to help the group, not to influence the outcome.

In the 1990s, I supervised Lyn Carson in her PhD. She had been elected to her local council (the local government body in Australia) and tried out a range of citizen participation methods, and studied them as well. After finishing her degree, together we wrote a book and several articles. Carson went on with her efforts to promote deliberative democracy, becoming one of the world's leading figures, setting up a research network in the field.[14]

I knew about citizens juries, about how they come up with sensible recommendations and are, for many participants, a highlight of their lives. These experiences give hope that these sorts of decision-making groups could replace governments. But don't these groups have the usual dysfunctions, such as power plays, bullying, and shaming? There wasn't anything written about this, at least not that I knew about. Carson had immense hands-on experience, so I asked her.

She said that some people caused problems, including those with behaviours going under the labels of psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism. How to deal with

14 Democracy R&D, https://democracyrd.org

this challenge? First, she told me, larger groups posed more problems: the process could be undermined when determined minorities tried to railroad the larger group. With smaller sizes — ten, twenty or thirty — there were fewer such problems.

It is vital to have strong facilitation. This should include an initial agreement, by everyone involved, to observe certain norms, for example respect for minorities and giving everyone an opportunity to speak. Carson said that with this groundwork, members of the group took over much of the process, not allowing individuals to become domineering or disruptive. As well, the usual suite of techniques is helpful, like speaking in turn and rotating tasks.

Dilemmas

Writers in the anarchist tradition haven't devoted much attention to group dynamics, to the nitty-gritty of how people interact in self-managing groups. Yet there's a rich body of ideas, methods and experience that can be used to build groups that are both effective and satisfying. So is there any problem?

The big challenge is to promote greater uptake of knowledge and experience for operating in groups in an egalitarian way. There are innumerable books, articles and consultants concerned with improving the performance of groups in hierarchical organisations, especially in businesses. But there's no equivalent attention to egalitarian groups. Nor is there much attention to how to transform hierarchical organisations using egalitarian group techniques. How can this be done? Can it be done?

Techniques for improving group dynamics, and for individual self-awareness in a group context, are still being developed. There's a growing body of practitioners and experience, but still a long way to go. How many people have ever heard of nonviolence training, or of groups like Prosocial? The challenge is how to take these ideas and methods to ever larger numbers of people, without losing their critical edge.

5
In and against the state

Imagine you are opposed to the state, yet you work for the state. Sounds challenging, even contradictory. However, it's not uncommon. Trade unionists work for the organisation whose managers they regularly challenge.

Socialists who oppose capitalism, yet live in a capitalist society, can't help but use goods and services provided by corporations, many of them exploitative. If you want to be pure, you could live off the grid, grow your own food and build your own house, but even then you would be relying on products and skills derived from corporations. Anyway, what's transformative about being pure, if you're not contributing to change? You might have a bigger impact by challenging the system from within.

Surprisingly, it's hard to find discussions about this. The most promising treatment I found is a book titled *In and Against the State,* published in 1980. The authors were a group of socialists with jobs funded by the British state, including teachers, legal advisers in an advice centre and community health council workers. As socialists, they were attracted to services provided by the state rather than by private enterprises. But they realised that these state services oppressed their clients.

They were a working group of the Conference of Socialist Economists, and called themselves the London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group. Some of them worked

in London and some in Edinburgh — quite a distance away — and they would get together on weekends.

They make the solid point that their opposition to the state must be in the job, not just after hours. And it must be against the system, what they call the prevailing social relations, not just funding levels.

They say class struggle is an everyday thing, and is unavoidable. For them in their jobs, daily contact with the state was a crucial area of class struggle and, because they worked in and for the state, they had to oppose it from within.

A key idea is that challenging the state means living and working differently, to create a better way of relating to people. What does this mean in practice? Rather than acting individually, they argued for collective organisation and defining problems in their own way. As teachers, legal advisers or community workers, their jobs were set up to deal with issues on a case-by-case basis, helping students or clients one at a time. As socialists, they thought this was a misleading approach: systemic change was needed.

As I read *In and Against the State,* I was impressed by the authors' initiative to think through their situation, to have a vision of an alternative when, from a traditional socialist perspective, state services *were* the alternative to privately owned and run services. They saw, through their jobs, that nationalisation — having services provided by the state — was not enough. They saw that having socialists rising to positions of power in the state wasn't enough, but instead that the state was part of the problem. As they put it, "to pursue power by winning positions of influence for

the working class *within the terms of the state form of social relations* is mistaken."[1]

What I would have liked is more specifics about what it means to struggle for different social relations, in other words different ways for people to relate to each other, individually and collectively. So I've kept on the lookout for stories from others who work for the state and are against the state, and suggest personal and collective strategies — but have not come across any. So all I can do here is suggest some possibilities.

Say you work for the military, and are an anti-militarist. One option is to get out. That's an option if you want to oppose the military and hence the state, but it's not "in and against the state." Another option is to stay in and try to change things. How? I'm not sure. It's too far outside my experience. Well, actually, there are stories of changing the culture of the military, to challenge abuse of new recruits, to allow women to participate, to relax dress codes.

Some soldiers commit crimes, for example killing civilians in wartime. If you're on the inside, seeing it happen, you can try to stop it or, if that's not possible, document events and testify to a war crimes tribunal. Or talk to a journalist. This is what happened with Australian soldiers fighting in Afghanistan. A few of them killed civilians or prisoners, or encouraged their subordinates to do this. This sort of thing happens in many wars but is seldom exposed. This time it was different. There were media reports, a government inquiry and a court case for

1 London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, *In and Against the State* (London: Pluto, 1980), p. 138.

defamation. Many soldiers were willing to testify, to the inquiry or the court, that Australia's most highly decorated Afghanistan war veteran, Ben Roberts-Smith, had committed war crimes. These soldiers wanted the Australian army to be ethical and were willing to testify against a fellow soldier, something that hardly ever happens.[2]

How does this relate to being in and against the state, in this case in and against the military? I'm not sure.

Say you're a teacher, in a state-supported primary school. Searching anarchist writing about education, most of it is about "free schools," which are not state schools.[3] The most famous is Summerhill, in England, where students and teachers collectively make decisions about what to learn and how to run the school. It's wonderful, but it's not "in and against the state."

Then there are the courageous teachers who do everything they can to motivate students in the most underprivileged state schools. Most of what I've read in this genre is about US inner-city schools.[4] The authors provide inspirational stories and contribute to reform movements. Their aim is to help students, especially the most disadvantaged ones, and throw a light on inequitable educational

2 Nick McKenzie, *Crossing the Line: The Inside Story of Murder, Lies and a Fallen Hero* (Sydney: Hachette, 2025).

3 Allen Graubard, *Free the Children: Radical Reform and the Free School Movement* (New York: Random House, 1972); Jonathan Kozol, *Free Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972); Joel Spring, *A Primer of Libertarian Education* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975).

4 Daniel Fader, *The Naked Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

systems. That's wonderful, but it's not much guidance for trying to dismantle or reconstruct educational systems to operate without the state.

Radical commentary on education seems inevitably to turn to the ideas of Paolo Freire, the Brazilian educator who taught literacy to adults as a radicalising process. I haven't read everything written about Freire's ideas, but nothing that I've read provides much guidance for challenging the state while working for the state.[5]

Another possibility is "deschooling," as argued by Ivan Illich in his classic book *Deschooling Society.* Illich was a critic of all professions, including teaching, which he called "disabling." The deschooling vision is that children learn as part of the community. For example, they might spend time at workplaces, more as apprentices than students, learning by doing. The deschooling movement has made very little progress since Illich's book.[6]

5 Classic books critical of schooling include Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education* (New York: Vintage, 1962); John Holt, *Freedom and Beyond* (Pelican, 1973); John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help people Do Things* (Penguin, 1977); Everett W. Reimer, *School Is Dead: An Essay on Alternatives in Education* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971); Joel H. Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).

6 Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). I summarised the lack of progress in the chapter on deschooling in *Better? Is the World Going Down the Drain?* (Sparsnäs, Sweden, Irene Publishing, 2024).

Deschooling is a challenge to the state, certainly. It dispenses with schools and compulsory schooling. But it offers little guidance for teachers working in the public schooling system — or, for that matter, in the private system — on how to create alternatives to the state. But wait. Maybe promoting deschooling is an option. Teachers could inform students about how they can avoid school and learn on their own in the community. Could that become a social movement? It sounds unlikely. It sounds more like a way to quickly lose your job.

Thinking about ways to work "in and against the state" is challenging. I couldn't come up with good examples from the military or education. The authors of the book *In and Against the State* were onto something important, but their pioneering efforts have not been followed up on. Does this mean that working on the inside against the state is too difficult or just not a very effective approach? I don't know. It seems like an important area that has been neglected.

6
Isms

Anarchism is a political philosophy, a way of approaching power and the way humans organise their lives. There are many other political philosophies, going under names like Marxism and liberalism, with related concepts like capitalism and industrialism. It sounds like they are all "isms," but not quite. Entering the religious domain — which is also about the way humans organise their lives — there are some isms, like Hinduism, Buddhism and Catholicism, but also some others with different expressions in English, like Islam and Christianity. Whether they are isms probably doesn't matter.

What's the connection between anarchism and related views of the world? It's convenient to start with two closely related perspectives, socialism and Marxism. Historically, beginning in the 1800s in Europe, socialism was an alternative to capitalism. Socialism is based on collective ownership of the means of production, rather than private ownership. Within the socialist umbrella, Marxists and anarchists competed for support. Let's set aside the dispute and focus on the ideas. Marxism is a critique of capitalism; anarchists, like Marxists, also oppose capitalism. Early anarchists admired Karl Marx's incisive analysis of capitalism.

Another commonality: early anarchists and Marxists shared a vision of a post-capitalist society. At the time, it

was called communism: a society based on collective self-organisation, without the state and without private ownership. Unfortunately, the term "communism" became a source of confusion after the 1917 Russian Revolution, when the Bolsheviks assumed power and were called Communists. Like others, I'll use the capitalised word Communism to distinguish it from the vision of a post-capitalist society called communism.

Anarchists and Marxists shared a vision of the goal, communism. Where they differed was in how to get there. Marxists wanted to gain state power, either through elections or seizure by a revolutionary party, and use the power of the state to dismantle capitalism, replacing it with socialism. Only after this would the state "wither away," leading to pure communism, a stateless workers' paradise. Anarchists thought this scenario was fanciful. They opposed capitalism but even more the state. They saw danger in using the power of the state to overcome capitalism, because such a powerful state would be a monstrous oppressive force.

If you want, it's possible to delve into the debates in the 1800s within the socialist movement, between Marxists and anarchists, and relate their positions to what has happened since then. It's fascinating stuff. But how useful is it? Why bother with this sort of history, which seems to have only a tenuous relationship with current-day challenges? Good questions.

My own approach has been eclectic, which means that I pull together ideas from a range of sources and positions rather than following a single "line" or philosophy. That means being willing to find useful ideas from anarchism,

Marxism, feminism … and, gasp, maybe even liberalism. Maybe not fascism. But first, more on eclecticism. Yes, it can be an ism.

Following a single line makes things easy, in one way. Just find the authoritative intellectuals, the greatest leaders, the experienced campaigners, and follow what they say and do. There's nothing inherently wrong with this, if the values and goals are ones you support. The key things are the values and goals.

However, following a line isn't always as easy as it sounds. That's because, within any group or movement or belief system, there are disagreements, dissenting views, antagonisms and splits. When there's a split, which way do you go? Back in the days when Communist parties were found in most Western countries, there was a split in 1968, in the wake of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. This alienated many members. Only some remained loyal to the Soviet leaders; others moved to be independent. Then there were Western Communists allied to the Chinese Communist Party. You might want to follow a Communist line, but which one? Or you might be sympathetic to the values of Communists, but not want to align with any of the available parties. Do you set up your own party?

As mentioned, I've taken an eclectic approach, but it has its own challenges. The idea with eclecticism is to take what's useful from any source, while ignoring or rejecting what isn't. This is sort of what anarchists have done. Starting from a central value in rejecting domination and supporting collective self-management, most anarchists have broadened their scope from opposing the state and opposing capitalism. The feminist movement stimulated

anarchists to oppose patriarchy, but with a special angle, opposing the state, capitalism and patriarchy. Not all feminists do this. Many feminists support women gaining equality with men within hierarchical structures. This is called liberal feminism. There are other varieties, including socialist feminism, radical feminism and anarchafeminism.

You can see that the possibilities start multiplying every time another oppression is added to the mix. Racism is one. The domination of nature is another. Heterosexism is another. There are debates about each one, with anarchist perspectives in the mix.

These are relatively easy, except that there can be tensions within and between the critiques of different forms of domination, and tensions over strategies to overcome them. One important tension involves practice: do campaigners need to be pure in every way to work together? If someone makes a sexist, racist or ableist comment, should they be called out, condemned, shunned or even expelled? Should animal liberationists work with those who are not vegetarians, or not vegans? Is it okay for environmentalists to drive a car and take long-distance trips by air?

These questions could be multiplied, and answers are not easy.

Let me try another angle. Can anarchists learn from those who are critical of or hostile to anarchism? In many cases, the answer is "of course." Scientists who study the health effects of toxic chemicals, and alternatives to these chemicals, provide valuable knowledge to anyone concerned about health. The political views of the scientists shouldn't matter, so long as they haven't undermined the validity of their findings.

But what about those who make criticisms of anarchism … and of feminism, Marxism, environmentalism and the like? What about those who are hostile? It is tempting to dismiss critics. But there's another approach: learn from them. There can be much to learn.

7
Kropotkin on the state

Peter Kropotkin was a Russian nobleman, scientist and anarchist. He lived from 1842 to 1921, and is one of the most famous and influential early anarchist figures. His works and ideas continue to be discussed more than a century after his death.

In 1896, Kropotkin was invited to give a talk in Paris, and his planned topic was the state. However, after he arrived by boat, French police, at the instruction of a government minister, expelled him from the country. At the time, he was a prominent radical, and his treatment might be called, in contemporary terms, an instance of cancel culture.

Kropotkin's talk was soon published. In English translation, it is titled *The State: Its Historic Role.*[1]

Kropotkin begins by noting that socialists were divided in their approach to the state. Some wanted to use the powers of the state to support a social revolution, to bring about a society based on equality and liberty. Other socialists, though, saw the state as an obstacle to social revolution. Their goal was to abolish the state.

In order to appreciate the role of the state, Kropotkin says it is important to understand its history, including what

1 Quotes here are from the 1969 edition published by Freedom Press, a new translation from the French by Vernon Richards. Emphases are all in this edition.

it had replaced. Most of *The State* is about this history. But first, it is worth reflecting on Kropotkin's preliminary comments about socialists.

The division among socialists was a crucial feature of what is called the First International. On one side were Karl Marx and his followers, who saw the state as a means to socialist revolution, and on the other side were the anarchists. What Kropotkin did not anticipate, in 1896, was that the anarchists would be sidelined and that state-supporting socialists would themselves split in a dramatic way.

The state-oriented socialists were divided between those who favoured a reform path, using elections to gain power, and those who favoured a revolutionary path, taking state power by force. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, the revolutionary path became identified with Marxism-Leninism, the ideology of the Bolsheviks. The reform path became identified with parliamentary parties of the left, including both Communist and social democratic parties. But most of this was long after Kropotkin wrote *The State.* His concern was more fundamental.

Kropotkin is careful to distinguish between the state and government. For him, the state is a broader structure of power, "the *concentration of many functions of the life of societies in the hands of a few.*"[2] It includes legislation and policing. Today's political scientists continue to make this distinction, with the government being the executive, elected or not, and the state also including government departments like those responsible for law enforcement, taxation, welfare, education, public health and much else.

2 Ibid., p. 10.

Kropotkin didn't go into detail about the specific functions of the state, which have greatly expanded and transformed since he wrote. His main interest was in the origins of the state, more specifically its immediate European predecessors.

Kropotkin noted that the Roman Empire was a state, a perfect example of one. "Everything flowed towards Rome: economic and military life, wealth, education, nay, even religion. From Rome came the laws, the magistrates, the legions to defend the territory, the prefects and the gods."[3] However, Kropotkin's focus was not on the Roman Empire but on a completely different way of organising social life, in groups called the Barbarians, referring to the tribes that eventually overran the Empire. From the end of the Empire in the 400s until the rise of the modern state over a millennium later, many people in Europe — according to Kropotkin — lived in "communes." These were villages, largely self-reliant. Significantly, they had no rulers, no police, instead handling matters of justice internally.

Then, in the 1000s and 1100s, according to Kropotkin, many European towns were organised communally.

> With these elements — liberty, organisation growing from the simple to the complex, production and exchange by the different trades (guilds), foreign trade handled by the whole city and not by individuals, and the purchase of provisions by the city for resale to the citizens at cost price — with such elements, the towns of the Middle Ages for the first two centuries of their free existence, became centres of well-being for all the inhabitants, centres of wealth and culture, such as we have not seen since.[4]

3 Ibid., p. 11.

Kropotkin saw these communes — village and town — as models of societies without states. His point was that they had features of an alternative to the state, showing that the modern state was not necessary for human societies to thrive.

Kropotkin went beyond this, pointing to the ways that emerging states gradually took over the functions of the communes. Importantly, part of this was the system of dispute resolution, commonly known as justice and the law. Communes, in Kropotkin's telling, settled their own disputes, often through arbitration. For example, when two communes clashed, members of a third commune would be invited to arbitrate.

How exactly this gradual usurpation of autonomous activity occurred is not quite clear in Kropotkin's telling, but he states definitively *why* emerging states succeeded in taking over. The problem was that people in the countryside remained oppressed. The communes were based in towns, but they did not bring their country brethren into their system based on freedom and liberty. Therefore, country people were responsive to the barons and aspiring kings who sought to expand their powers by subordinating the communes.

Kropotkin also mentions the ancient Greeks with their remarkable democracies. But like the communes much

4 Ibid., p. 27.

later, the ancient Greeks failed to expand liberties to all the population: women and slaves were excluded from decision-making processes.

Kropotkin distinguishes between two types of conflict or struggle, constructive and destructive.

> In the commune, the struggle was for the conquest and defence of the liberty of the individual, for the federative principle, for the right to unite and to act; whereas the States' wars had as their objective the destruction of these liberties, the submission of the individual, the annihilation of the free contract, and the uniting of men into a universal slavery to king, judge and priest — to the State.[5]

Throughout *The State,* Kropotkin refers to three groups constituting the State's power. As noted above, they were "king, judge and priest." In many states today, the role of religion is limited, though there are exceptions, such as Iran and Israel. On the other hand, state power today depends on the police and military.

Towards the end of *The State,* Kropotkin criticises those who want to use the state as a means of liberation. As he puts it:

> They expect the State whose very raison d'être is the crushing of the individual, the hatred of initiative, the triumph of *one* idea which must be inevitably that of mediocrity — to become the lever for the accomplishment of this immense transformation! … They want to direct the revival of a society by means of decrees and electoral majorities … How ridiculous![6]

5 Ibid., pp. 30–31.

His argument is that the state should be abolished rather than used as a tool for liberation. Although he doesn't state this explicitly, this is an example of wanting the means for change to be compatible with the ends being sought. Means-ends compatibility is a distinctive feature of anarchist thinking, in contrast with those who seek state power in order to lay the basis for a society without the state.

The State provides Kropotkin's perspective on the state in a particularly cogent form, which is, perhaps, why it has been reprinted so many times after its first publication.

Three of Kropotkin's ideas remain foundational to anarchist thought and action. First, the state is an oppressive social institution, hostile to freedom and liberty. Second, the state attempts to destroy alternative ways of organising life, in particular ways in which people live together without relying on higher authorities. Third, trying to use the state to solve social problems is a bad idea.

It is also worth noting some things missing from Kropotkin's account of the state. While he speaks highly of European communes, in villages and towns throughout the continent, prior to the rise of the modern state, he says nothing about their dysfunctions — and there were bound to have been many. He gives little sense of what they could have done differently to survive, aside from seeking to emancipate the peasantry living outside the towns.

6 Ibid., p. 55.

Kropotkin does not emphasise differences between states, between autocratic and democratic, and how these differences might affect how to challenge them. He does not offer a strategy for challenging the state, or for creating alternatives to it.

It would be unfair to expect Kropotkin to anticipate the future. He could not have foreseen that the Russian Revolution, which occurred shortly before he died, would lead to 80 years of state socialism in the Soviet Union — but he would not have been surprised that the Leninist strategy of capturing state power to destroy capitalism was a mistake. In fact, it was a disaster for socialism, which became identified with, or tainted by, Soviet tyranny. Lenin was notoriously hostile to the anarchists of his time, and after the Russian Revolution, anarchism entered a long period of limited influence within the wider socialist movement.

Even less could Kropotkin have anticipated the capacity of capitalism to generate material wealth for much of the population, while maintaining the power of owners and managers. Workers have been, in a sense, bought off with the promise of affluence, and the dream of local control largely lost.

In conclusion, it is worth learning from Kropotkin that alternatives to the modern state existed and that the emerging state smashed these alternatives. Looking around the world today, there is plenty of evidence that the state continues to be hostile to alternatives.

The state and domination

Historically, anarchists have seen the state as a key source of oppression, indeed the most important one. But there are

other sources of oppression. One is patriarchy, the collective domination of women for the benefit of men, or at least some men. Feminists oppose patriarchy, but not necessarily the state. Some feminists see the government as their ally in passing laws against discrimination and sexual harassment, and support more women gaining positions of power within the state. On the other hand, some feminists also support anarchism.

The same sort of connection can be made between anarchism and anti-capitalists (ones who support the state, as a tool for liberation, sometimes to take it over), and between anarchism and environmentalists. However, these relationships have become messier because, these days, few anarchists are fixated on the state as the prime source of oppression. Instead, it is now common for anarchists to oppose any form of oppression and exploitation. Anarchists are likely to be against capitalism, patriarchy, racism, domination of nature, heterosexism, you name it. But there is still a distinctive feature of anarchist-inspired action: it is against any form of domination, the power of some over others.

But what exactly is the relationship between different forms of domination? Which campaigns should take precedence? If one of the goals of anarchists is to oppose the state, to build alternatives to the state, where to start? Kropotkin's call to action is still relevant:

> Yes: death — or renewal! Either the State for ever, crushing individual and local life, taking over in all fields of human activity, bringing with it its wars and its domestic struggles for power, its palace revolutions

which only replace one tyrant by another, and inevitably at the end of this development there is … death! Or the destruction of the States, and new life starting again in thousands of centres on the principle of the lively initiative of the individual and groups and that of free agreement.[7]

7 Ibid., p. 56.

8
The Lucas inspiration

In the 1970s and 1980s, one of the most exciting developments in radical activism occurred in an unlikely place: a British company, Lucas Aerospace. I read about it in the alternative literature — it was never a major story in the mainstream press. One source was a booklet by David Elliott titled *The Lucas Aerospace Workers' Campaign.*[1]

According to Elliott, the company had 13,000 workers on 17 sites in the United Kingdom: it was a large workforce, making aircraft, including military aircraft. The exciting development was that the workers contributed to a "corporate plan" for what the company would produce.

This was radical. In nearly all companies, owners and top management decide on priorities. They do not say to the workers, "Please give us suggestions about what we might do differently, and that is socially useful." What do you think top management would say if workers came up with alternatives?

Lucas Aerospace had blue and white-collar workers at all sites, covered by 13 unions. This fragmentation was not a promising basis for collective action. What made action possible was a committee of "shop stewards," who are union representatives. It was called by an unwieldy name, the Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards' Committee.

1 David Elliott, *The Lucas Aerospace Workers' Campaign* (London: Fabian Society, 1977).

Elliott wrote that the committee developed a corporate plan that included "socially useful production," for example kidney dialysis machines and road-rail transport vehicles. Some of these proposed projects were quite different from aircraft manufacturing, but they drew on the workforce's skills. The committee solicited ideas from the workers, who of course had knowledge of their own skills. The corporate plan also included changes in the control of work.

If you believe corporate managers are guided by enlightened self-interest, you might imagine that Lucas' top management would welcome initiative from workers. However, their response was negative.

David Elliott's booklet was given to me by John Ball. That was in 1979, just after John and I had set up Canberra Peacemakers, the only peace group in Canberra at the time. The Lucas initiative was exciting from a peace perspective as a promising model for switching from military production to production for civilian purposes and human needs. This is called "peace conversion" or "economic conversion."

Peace conversion is routine after wars. During World War II, arms manufacture became a top priority in the economies of Germany, Japan, Italy, Britain, the Soviet Union, the US and other participating countries. After the war ended, many arms factories were shut down or converted to civilian production. Vehicle manufacturing companies could switch from making tanks to making cars.

After World War II, arms manufacture continued, just not on the same scale. This was the time of the military-industrial complex, the continuation of extensive arms manufacturing and sales during what was nominally peace-

time. Britain was not at war, at least not a war requiring the aeroplanes being produced by Lucas Aerospace.

The Lucas plan was different from previous processes of peace conversion. It was an initiative during peacetime — during a period with no shooting war. More importantly, it was an initiative from the workforce rather than management. Furthermore, the plan was explicitly about production for human needs. It was exciting for anyone concerned about alternatives to war.

In those days, before the Internet, we learned about developments at places like Lucas Aerospace from articles in magazines, and from books. The definitive account of the Lucas initiative was published a few years later, authored by Hilary Wainwright — a prominent socialist thinker — and Dave Elliott, who had written the booklet I had read previously. Their book offered a history, a political analysis and suggestions for strategy.[2]

One thing they addressed was why the workers' initiative occurred at Lucas Aerospace rather than some other company. Wainwright and Elliott listed six factors. First, the workforce was highly skilled. Second, the technology involved, aerospace components, was versatile, able to be used for other purposes. Third, there was already a tradition at the company of making different products, in aerospace components. Fourth, the economic environment was planned: there was no market, no competition with other firms, which meant that management couldn't justify its decisions by referring to market pressures. Fifth, the

2 Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliott, *The Lucas Plan: A New Trade Unionism in the Making?* (London: Allison & Busby, 1982).

Combine Committee was recognised but independent. Sixth, there was political support for the plan from parts of the Labour government.

The last of these factors, political support, didn't last. Tony Benn, an influential minister in the Labour government, was a key supporter, but he left parliament. The prime minister, Harold Wilson, made planning agreements an optional extra as one of several steps to "restore business confidence." Despite this weakness of political support, Wainwright and Elliott say that backing from a socialist government is essential for the success of worker initiatives, to delegate power and legitimacy to workers' committees, possibly break up existing company structures and set a national framework of economic planning.

Even as they wrote, the prospects for such support were receding rapidly. The Conservative Party won power and Margaret Thatcher became prime minister, launching a frontal attack on trade unions. After this, workers' plans never again seemed such a possibility.

Nevertheless, there remains much to learn from the Lucas experience, including from the difficulties that the campaigners encountered. The Combine Committee faced enormous obstacles. Unlike Benn, most Labour ministers were unsympathetic. The government bureaucracy was unsympathetic. Many trade unions were unsympathetic, including the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and the peak body, the Trade Union Council.

One challenge in developing the plan was to come up with ideas for "socially useful products." Such products need to satisfy several criteria. There should be no wastage of energy or materials in manufacture or use. It should be

possible to produce them in a labour-intensive way, thus retaining jobs. And the product should be suited for production in a non-alienating, non-authoritarian way. In other words, the work to produce them should be satisfying and not involve control by bosses.

To develop ideas for possible products satisfying these criteria, the workers themselves were the most important source. However, the Combine also sought outside assistance. They sent letters to 180 organisations and individuals well known for their interest and expertise in "alternative technology" — which refers to small-scale technologies that can be locally controlled and are not harmful to the environment — asking for suggestions about socially useful technologies.

This part of the story was especially interesting to me. I was intrigued by the possibilities for alternative technologies, and subscribed to the British magazine *Undercurrents,* which was about technologies suited to communities that were self-reliant and self-governing, in essence an anarchistic alternative society. *Undercurrents* published some of my articles.

So how many of the 180 organisations and individuals, known for their interest in alternative technology, replied to letters from the Combine? Just three. Two of them had prior contact with the Combine, and one of those was none other than Dave Elliott.

Many of the 180 organisations and individuals were academics. The limitations of the universities in relation to the plan were also shown when the Combine Committee sought to establish a centre at a university jointly controlled by the university and the Combine, for students and staff to

work on socially useful products. The deputy director of Birmingham Polytechnic demanded that the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce be one of the controlling partners; this was unacceptable to the Combine. The Senate steering committee of Warwick University rejected a centre; the vice-chancellor had called Lucas management. Eventually a base was found in the Combined Engineering Department of Coventry Polytechnic. Wainwright and Elliott summed up this experience:

> So, after three years of negotiating with academic hierarchies which turned out to be no less conservative and jealous of their powers than Lucas management, the Lucas stewards are jointly controlling a project full of promise. The difficulties faced by the Lucas stewards during those three years indicates that, in order to achieve this use of academic resources, people working in those public institutions and in private industry, and the people who use and consume from both, need to organize across those institutions as well as within them. For one reason why the rulers of the established order have the upper hand is that they have strongly bonded connecting links, both formal and informal.[3]

In 1983, I was working on my book *Uprooting War.* One chapter was on peace conversion, and I included a discussion of the Lucas plan. I sought comments on drafts of the manuscript from quite a few individuals, and one of them was Dave Elliott. Among his other publications was *The Control of Technology,* co-authored by Ruth Elliott, which

3 Ibid., p. 230.

I thought was one of the most astute treatments of the politics of technology I had seen.[4]

Dave thought my treatment of the Lucas plan was reasonable except for one point. I had written that one of the goals of the plan was maintaining or increasing profit. Dave disagreed. He wrote to me: "The Combine said they would match non-profitable but socially useful products with profitable socially useful products as a bargaining package, but they were interested in 'social profitability'. How profitable is a hospital or school — or a Harrier jump jet?"

The Lucas plan was more than a matter of what products to make — it was a threat to management, which normally has full control. The Combine thus was in conflict with management over who was running the company, and management did everything possible to sink the plan. According to Wainwright and Elliott, the chair of the Combine, Jim Cooney, was apparently bought off by Lucas management. The secretary of the Combine, Ernie Scarbrow, was harassed and attempts were made to dismiss him from his job. Mike Cooley, a key figure in the plan, was dismissed.[5]

In 1982, when Wainwright and Elliott's book was published, the future of workers' plans looked bright. The Lucas plan might have been thwarted, but it was an inspiration to workers internationally. The special conditions that enabled Lucas workers to take the first initiative of its type

4 See the chapter on experts.

5 See Mike Cooley, *Architect or Bee? The Human/technology Relationship* (Slough: Langley Technical Services, n.d., ca. 1979).

were no longer needed: because of their example, it was easier for others to follow.

The inspiration fades

The Lucas plan was a high point in challenging managerial control. Many groups have challenged *what* is produced. For example, the anti-war movement has campaigned for controls over arms production. But most of this pressure has come from the outside. At Lucas, workers took the initiative. It was partly to protect jobs but went far beyond jobs, wages and working conditions, the usual focus of unions. The idea of socially useful production was taken up by workers, who also brought to the task their roles as citizens, users and consumers.

One of the most inspiring features of the Lucas plan was that workers, taking on the task of designing products, would be so socially minded. They didn't want to make life easy for themselves, or make products to serve a self-interested goal. Rather, they wanted to help others, to serve the social good. They provided a dramatic contrast to the priorities of managers and owners who, despite rhetoric crafted by their public relations personnel, were and are driven by profits and power.

The Lucas plan was highly influential at the time, inspiring workers around the world. Nonetheless, the prospect for workers' plans seems more remote than before. Similarly, the idea of peace conversion, of switching from military to civilian production, dropped off the agenda of the peace movement. In the 1980s, there were a few peace conversion campaigns, but any since then are little known.

Imagine what would have happened if the Lucas plan had just been the beginning of a transformation of production. There would be plans in every major workplace. There would be new struggles, with competing visions of what is socially useful. The focus would be on service to society and the environment, not on profits.

Every major university would host a department or unit on socially useful products. This would be the driver of research in all fields, rather than — as is standard today — funding by the military, corporations and governments.

Finally, governments would support workers' plans, providing economic frameworks to enable them to become the basis for planning.

None of this happened. According to Wainwright and Elliott, workers' plans need the support of a socialist government. However, since the 1970s, socialist alternatives have been increasingly marginalised.

The Lucas plan was thwarted by Lucas management, and also was obstructed by some unions. At the beginning, it had support from some influential figures in the British government, but this faded.

Is it possible to imagine a resurgence of workers' plans? It's not easy. The obstacles from management are huge. And governments are not interested.

Schofield's view

After the 1980s, I didn't keep up with conversion development. Maybe I would have heard about anything major, but those closer to the action might know differently. Therefore it was fortuitous that in February 2025 I read a blog post by

Steven Schofield.[6] He describes himself as "a researcher on arms conversion and international security, having written for peace organisations including CND and CAAT and for trade unions. My recent work is on the creation of a post-carbon and post-militarist economy based on anarchist and syndicalist principles of workers control."[7]

Sounds like an ideal person. In his blog post, Schofield comments on a recent call for a revival of a national Lucas plan for British industry. That sounds encouraging, but Schofield argues that times have changed. Since the 1980s, arms manufacturing has become increasingly specialised.

This was true even in the 1980s. Mary Kaldor wrote an important book titled *The Baroque Arsenal*.[8] "Baroque" here refers to architecture that is highly elaborate, requiring specialised skills. Unlike the weapons systems of World War II, arms manufacturing thereafter became increasingly distanced from civilian manufacturing. It's not easy to see how the skills for building a Trident submarine, capable of launching dozens of nuclear missiles delivered precisely to distant targets, could be shifted for civilian purposes. There's little demand for submarines for the tourist trade or for missile delivery of consumer goods.

6 Steven Schofield, "Peaceful Alternatives to the Military-industrial Complex: Arms Conversion Beyond the Lucas Plan," 4 February 2025, http://stevenschofield.co.uk/?p=350.

7 CND is the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and CAAT is the Campaign Against the Arms Trade.

8 Mary Kaldor, *The Baroque Arsenal* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1982).

Schofield, referring to BAE Systems, "responsible for nuclear submarines, naval shipbuilding and fighter aircraft production," noted that employment had declined dramatically since the 1980s and that "The specialised nature of these sites cannot be over-emphasised."

Schofield's solution is straightforward: military spending has to be drastically cut, and reoriented to energy self-reliance, to deal with climate change. He writes, referring to the military-industrial complex (MIC):

> Any conversion policy rests on closing down the MIC and creating a new institutional structure for disarmament and civil investment, using broader forms of economic democracy and popular planning. … Whatever model emerges from these forms of democratic planning, the objective must be to devolve economic decision-making, as far as possible, to local communities and to maximise the economic benefits for working people, such as skilled work, democratic ownership of industry and the circulation of income locally.

Sounds good, but incredibly difficult to achieve. As Schofield writes, the MIC has a vice-like grip on social planning. It involves arms companies and the military in a tight embrace, all with the support of the government. Despite decades of anti-war campaigning, it is rare for politicians to advocate disarmament or economic conversion.

The Lucas plan was inspiring at the time, and still is, and the case for converting the economy from arms manufacture to production for human needs remains strong,

but what will cause a change? What will lead to a process that dents the power of the MIC and changes thinking throughout society about alternatives to the military?

Should anarchists be initiating conversion campaigns? Or following Schofield's advice and trying to shut down the MIC? What's the way forward?

9
What's in a name?

The contrast could hardly be starker. In popular commentary and media reports, "anarchy" means chaos and mayhem, the breakdown of social order. It is built on the assumption that when police and government are not around to keep things under control, people's inhibitions will drop, and they will be involved in looting, rioting and killing. Anarchy is seen as the collapse of civilisation, something to be avoided at all costs, because no one would be safe.

Yet there is another meaning of anarchy: a social order without government or other forms of domination, in which people collectively make decisions about how to run their lives. It is a society based on cooperation and mutual support, in which people have both freedom and security — especially security against police and government agents, but also economic security.

If you look up dictionary definitions, you'll find both these meanings. It's curious.

There's an associated word, "anarchist." In popular commentary, anarchists are agents of chaos, seeking to wreck the establishment, seemingly without any positive purpose. The other meaning of anarchist is someone who supports anarchy — the positive meaning — and tries to bring it about.

Another associated word is anarchism. It's usually connected to the second meaning of anarchy. Anarchism is a political philosophy, like liberalism, socialism and fascism. It is based on principles. "Anarchism" is less likely to be confused with chaos and mayhem, but not many people are familiar with it or what it represents.

Some people use different words to refer to the political meanings of anarchy and anarchism. One is "self-management." This refers to groups of people managing their lives by themselves, without bosses. It's especially relevant to workplaces. Instead of workers being under the authority of managers (and managers under the authority of higher-level managers), the workers collectively make decisions about how to do the work, who gets paid what, and what to produce. They do it themselves, hence the "self" in self-management. In the workplace, this is more commonly called "workers' control," but "workers' self-management" is much the same.

However, as a substitute for "anarchy," "self-management" has a problem. It's too easily confused with "self-development" and other "self-" combinations. It sounds individualistic, although the idea is about collective decision-making.

There are some other terms. One is "horizontalism." What's this all about? If we think of relationships between people in two dimensions, one of them is the vertical dimension, up and down, and the other is the horizontal dimension, sideways. "Vertical" is a way of talking about hierarchical social relations, with bosses or rulers higher up and subordinates or subjects lower down. In a vertical relationship, power and control are unequal. "Horizontal" is a way of talking about social relationships between equals, at the same level of power. So horizontalism can serve as a substitute for anarchy or anarchism. It has the advantage of getting away from the negative associations of "anarchy" but, for most people, it's unfamiliar and needs explaining. That can be a good thing.

So here's the dilemma. Is it better to use the words anarchy and anarchism, with all their nasty popular associations, or use one of the substitutes like self-management or horizontalism? Anarchism is a bit less risky; it doesn't sound quite as drastic as anarchy. But what the hell? Why not be provocative? Sometimes it's better to be proud, to flout the stigmatised identity. That's worked for Black and queer. But it doesn't always work. After all, anarchists have been campaigning since the 1800s, and there's still widespread misunderstanding about what it's all about.

Another dilemma: is it wise to say "I'm an anarchist"? That's assuming you identify with anarchist principles and practices, the ones in the long tradition of opposing systems of domination and building self-managed alternatives. But is it wise to use the word?

When talking with others with similar beliefs, saying "I'm an anarchist" is unlikely to be a problem, but it may be unnecessary. But when talking with others, being seen as an anarchist has positives and negatives. The positives are foremost when people know you well, know that you are honest, helpful, caring and peaceful. When people believe you are a good person, then seeing you as an anarchist can change their views about anarchism. It might also make them intrigued, wanting to know more.

The negatives are foremost when people don't know you and don't have much of an opportunity to get to know you. If they derive their ideas from popular characterisations of anarchists as bomb-throwing rebels, you've just spoiled an opportunity to change their views. Perhaps the word "anarchist" is just as irredeemable as "terrorist." Maybe you need to find out whether the word is a barrier to communication.

Then there are people who call themselves anarchists but you don't want to be associated with them. An example is the Black Bloc. They dress in black, the colour of anarchists, and at rallies some of them break shop windows and throw stones at police, seeking to avoid arrest by covering their faces and running away. Meanwhile, other protesters suffer the wrath of the police. Maybe that's okay with you, but if not, you might think Black Bloc activists are giving anarchism a bad name, and you don't want to be associated with them.

This causes a dilemma if you like the name anarchist but don't like the Black Bloc, who call themselves anarchists. What can you do? If there's time, you can explain your views and how they differ from the Black Bloc. But if you're talking briefly with a stranger or a journalist, you might be tempted to say, "The Black Bloc aren't real anarchists" or "The Black Bloc give other anarchists a bad name." It's challenging. And it's not peculiar to anarchism. Every well-known political perspective is plagued by bad actors who use its name. Exploitative multinational corporations might make honest small businesspeople avoid using the label "capitalist." Corrupt trade union officials are bad for principled labour organisers.

This problem is acute for anarchist-inclined individuals and groups because of the widespread use of "anarchy" as a synonym for chaos and mayhem.

You might come up with a good solution for yourself. Maybe you only use the term anarchist among comrades, and otherwise use other words. Or you choose a different term, like Gandhian or libertarian socialist, or avoid brief labels altogether. You have a good solution, but that doesn't solve the general problem, unless lots of others join with you. Not easy.

I think the problems with the words anarchy and anarchism will continue. The obvious explanation is that anarchism is a threat to powerful groups, on both the right and left of the political spectrum, indeed to everyone who supports the state system and corporate capitalism, and they are quite happy to discredit those who pose this threat.

Does it matter?

It would be nice if labels like "anarchism" didn't matter so much. What's important is what we do, isn't it, not what other people call it? Unfortunately, perhaps, words do make a big difference. You might be helping people, but if your critics can call it being selfish, your efforts may be compromised. Just think of the suffering caused by campaigners acting in the name of a religion or a country.

In some cases, words become more important than actions, or rather trigger actions in response. In some countries, still, citizens go to prison for insulting the sovereign. In other countries, citizens can be jailed for lying in court. Being officially designated a terrorist can put your life in danger.

Whether we like it or not, words do matter, so for those who hold views captured by meanings of "anarchist," it pays to take care in using and choosing how you describe yourself and how you describe others. Using anarchist precepts, the choice of words should be a collective, cooperative process. That's a good start, and provides a criterion for judging how others choose to describe themselves — and you. Are they open to dialogue about the most accurate and effective use of words?

Then there's another challenge. In cooperating in choosing words — whether "anarchism" or something else — how broad is the scope of cooperation? Is it enough to reach an agreement in your family or your action group? Or do you need to extend the discussion more broadly?

Maybe this is hypothetical, because there are so many people who use "anarchism" and other words in ways that clash with your ideas. What about those who are hostile to anarchism and want to discredit it?

10
Power

In 2014, I was contacted by Caroline Ambrus. She lived in Canberra, the national capital of Australia, and had come up against local government employees who abused their power, taking actions against local residents who offended them in some way — especially those who complained. Knowing of my support for whistleblowers, she contacted me.

As a result of her personal experiences, Caroline began collecting information about other abuses of power in Canberra, and the failure of agencies and the local government to provide redress. She wrote a book titled *Caught in the ACT.* ACT is the abbreviation for the Australian Capital Territory, the small administrative unit where the city of Canberra is located. Here is an excerpt from Caroline's book.

> Debbie Scattergood worked in Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS). In the course of her employment she became aware of internal documents which revealed contractual anomalies. The contractor had been allowed to bill the Government for extra work which had already been completed as opposed to the correct way of getting departmental approval first. Basically it was a rort. In late 2007, she exposed contractual anomalies amounting to $16 million for mowing and garden maintenance in the Woden-

> Weston area. For that price who wouldn't buy a lawn mower and have a go? As a result of her disclosures, she suffered discrimination at work for four years. Then her department tried to restructure her out of a job and she was the subject of a biased report in an attempt to cover up departmental wrongdoings. Because of this, Scattergood suffered reactive depression and financial distress whilst trying to defend her reputation. She had to sell her home to meet her ongoing legal costs.[1]

Bullying at work includes verbal abuse, ostracism, assignment to inappropriate duties, and a host of other forms of harassment. Bullying at work can be thought of as an abuse of power. What Caroline talked about in this example was an abuse of power and then a cover-up by those with the power to do something about it. She documented case after case that could be described by the three words in the subtitle of her book: cruelty, collusion and coverup.

I couldn't verify much of what Caroline had written, but all her examples fitted a pattern with which I was familiar from studying numerous cases of reprisals against whistleblowers. For anyone who has been the target of officials who make life difficult just because they can, her accounts ring true.

1 Caroline Ambrus, *Caught in the ACT — Government Cruelty, Collusion and Coverup* (Canberra: irrePRESSible Press, 2014), p. 118.

Goodness?

Do anarchists believe humans are inherently good? That's what I've read and heard people say, off and on, for many years. Sadly, I didn't keep a record of these statements.

Here's one line of thinking behind this claim. If there are some really bad people, unreformable, then they need to be controlled, to protect the rest of the population. Murderers and vandals can't be allowed to kill and destroy whenever they like. Governments control these antisocial elements using police and prisons. That's the first part of the thinking. Next, anarchists are opposed to government and say that people can organise their lives without hierarchical systems. But that means bad people will run rampant. So — the final step in this line of thought — anarchists must believe people are inherently good. Therefore, if everyone were brought up in a free society, no one would turn out to be a dangerous criminal.

I've always been suspicious about this way of thinking. It makes one crucial assumption: that governments serve to protect the population from the bad guys. Well, there's another crucial assumption along the way: that the bad people are not the ones in power.

I've never seen a survey of anarchists to find out their views about human nature. My view has always been that humans have the potential for good and evil. And because there's a potential for evil, for doing serious harm to others, any system that gives a great deal of power to a small number of people is vulnerable to the worst aspects of human behaviour. Hierarchical systems, including the state, give power to a few, the ones at the top. The anarchist case against the state is strong because humans are *not* inherently

good. It's the exact opposite of the claim that anarchists believe humans are inherently good.

There's something more. Power tends to corrupt. This idea has been around a long time. The anarchist Michael Bakunin gave three reasons against rule by scientists. The third was that power tends to corrupt: "… a scientific academy invested with absolute sovereignty, even if it were composed of the most illustrious men, would infallibly and soon end in its own moral and intellectual corruption."[2] This is an important idea, most famously associated with a saying by Lord Acton: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Acton, who lived from 1834 to 1902, was a political conservative.

Concerning the corruptions of power, it's all very well to quote Lord Acton, or Bakunin for that matter. We might rely on everyday observation, which can be revealing. But are there rigorous studies about power corrupting?

Beginning in the 1960s, David Kipnis undertook experiments, investigating the effects of power on the person exercising it. Kipnis was a psychologist, and his experiments were in a laboratory with volunteer subjects. As well as publishing many technical articles, he wrote two books, *The Powerholders* and *Technology and Power.*

Kipnis was especially interested in what he called the "metamorphic" effects of power: how exercising power over others affects the person exercising it. He showed how

2 *Bakunin on anarchy: selected works by the activist-founder of world anarchism,* edited by Sam Dolgoff (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), p. 228. Bakunin's arguments about rule by scientists are discussed in the chapter on experts.

those subject to power are seen as less worthy and hence can be exploited more than equals. He identified four ways that power tends to corrupt.

> (1) Power is highly valued and relentlessly pursued. This is power as an end or goal.
> (2) Power is used for self-enrichment. This is power as a means to an end.
> (3) Powerful people's self-concepts are affected by others' flattery, agreement and incorrect feedback. Their morality is changed to justify their exercise of power.
> (4) Powerful people devalue the powerless because it is easier to influence others if there is psychological distance from them, and the act of influencing others makes a person believe the others do not control their behaviour.[3]

In *Technology and Power,* Kipnis applied his ideas about the metamorphic effects of power to various technologies. One of them was medical technology. When doctors had access to technologies that were apparently effective — drugs, scans, blood tests, radiation, etc. — they felt they had more control, and in turn patients felt more dependent on them. In this situation, doctors' attitudes towards their patients were less favourable and the social distance between them greater. In contrast, when doctors had less access to technology and needed repeat visits for business, they used nicer bedside manners.

3 David Kipnis, *Technology and Power* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990), p. 42.

In a more recent article, Kipnis and co-author Bruce Rind examined how using persuasive techniques affects the users. They put 49 male undergraduate students in a situation where they were asked to write influence messages, one of three types: (1) rational arguments; (2) a large unreasonable request followed by a smaller request, called the door-in the-face approach; and (3) authoritative demands. The students who used rational persuasion thought more of the target, confirming Kipnis's earlier work, and also thought more of their own rational competence and friendliness. In contrast, the students who used door-in-the-face and authoritative techniques viewed themselves less favourably. Rind and Kipnis suggested that manipulative techniques should be subject to ethics warnings.[4]

There are thousands of studies of the effect of persuasive techniques on targets. Rind and Kipnis believed that their study was the first examination of how using influence techniques affects those using them.

I was impressed by Kipnis's research, and have long wondered why it hasn't received wider attention. Well, one reason is that it's threatening to powerholders, indeed to anyone seeking a role with some influence over others, including aspiring politicians (even those with the most progressive views), people seeking promotion in hierarchical organisations (that's most big organisations), and even those taking leading roles in youth groups and sporting

4 Bruce Rind and David Kipnis, "Changes in self-perception as a result of successfully persuading others," *Journal of Social Issues,* vol. 55, no. 1, 1999, pp. 141–156.

clubs. However, it's useful to remember that, as Lord Acton said, "Power *tends* to corrupt," even if his saying is often misquoted as "Power corrupts."

Since Kipnis did his research on the metamorphic effects of power, I've kept on the lookout for related studies, especially ones spelling out implications for social institutions. Important work has been done by Dacher Keltner, who summarised findings from technical research in his book *The Power Paradox.*[5]

Keltner provides lots of evidence that power comes from others: powerholders do not exercise power based on their own capacities, but through the acquiescence of other people. Furthermore — and this is the interesting part — people grant power to those who serve the common interest. This means that people who are grateful and helpful to others can gain power. Sounds good.

However, Keltner says, having power is risky. It can lead to abuses. He provides lots of evidence that those who are wealthier and more powerful take advantage of others in all sorts of ways. In short, power tends to corrupt.

In a chapter titled "The abuses of power," Keltner presents evidence that poorer individuals show greater compassion for others. In contrast, wealthier people are more likely to say it's okay to behave unethically, for example by cheating on taxes or accepting bribes. Power undermines respect and consideration for others. For example, the wealthy are more likely to "grab food, express sexual impulses, drive recklessly, and lie, cheat, and

5 Dacher Keltner, *The Power Paradox: How We Gain and Lose Influence* (London: Allen Lane, 2016; Penguin, 2017).

communicate rudely."[6] Those who feel powerful are willing to say it's admissible to behave unethically while condemning others for the very same behaviours.

The title of Keltner's book is *The Power Paradox.* The paradox is that people give power to those with desirable behaviours, but those behaviours change for the worse after power is acquired.

While Keltner focuses on behavioural change, later I found a book looking at something different: who seeks power in the first place. Brian Klaas, a political scientist, set out to examine power and corruption, examining neglected aspects, in particular why corruptible people are so attracted to positions where they can exercise power.

Klaas's book *Corruptible* is entertaining, by far the most engaging treatment of the corruptions of power. He travelled the world interviewing a range of people, including brutal dictators, trying to understand what makes them tick. Klaas's stories are informative, countering the stereotype that tyrants are nasty people up close.

Klaas accepts that power can corrupt, but thinks this process has been overestimated: "Certain traits cause some people to want power more than others. Too much attention is paid to the notion that power corrupts. Not enough attention is paid to why corruptible people seek power."[7]

Klaas says power may not corrupt as much as imagined because some corruption derives from features of

6 Ibid., p. 130.

7 Brian Klaas, *Corruptible: Who Gets Power and How It Changes Us* (London: John Murray, 2021), p. 41.

power systems. Four things are commonly overlooked: dirty hands, skill at doing bad, opportunity and scrutiny.

The problem of dirty hands works like this. Some people in power have to make decisions that will cause serious harm no matter what option they choose, for example generals in wartime who send troops on dangerous missions. Playing dirty — causing harm to prevent greater harm — may unfairly look like power causing corruption.

Secondly, some people learn to do bad, so it appears that power corrupts. Thirdly, powerholders have a greater capacity and opportunity to do harm, so it may not be power that corrupts. Fourthly, in evaluating someone's actions, the more scrutiny there is, the more likely bad behaviour will be detected. When those in power are scrutinised more, this gives the illusion that power corrupts.

In summary, "Yet, our intuitions about power can be flawed and mistaken. Four phenomena — dirty hands, learning, opportunity, and scrutiny — make it *seem* that power makes people worse than they actually are. We sometimes confuse the effects of power with intrinsic aspects of holding it."[8]

Klaas discusses the work of Dacher Keltner but seems unaware of the work of David Kipnis. If he had known about Kipnis's studies, he might not have said "But for decades, the scientific literature on how power affects us was limited."[9]

Although Klaas accepts hierarchies, his suggestions are helpful also for those who reject them.

8 Ibid., p. 148.

9 Ibid., p. 155.

One of the problems in exposing the corruptions of power is that many people believe the world is just.[10] Therefore, when there's an injustice, they blame the victim, like blaming someone who was assaulted for not taking precautions. For those who think the world is just, those who have power deserve it, and those who suffer from the abuses of power deserve it too.

In summary, Lord Acton's comment that "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" neatly encapsulates an insight that others think relevant. That's why it is so often quoted. But a neat quote is hardly the basis for a conclusion, hence the value of empirical research into the corruptions of power. David Kipnis was a pioneer on this topic, discovering the psychological processes involved in the corrupting influence of holding power, and spelling out the relevance of these processes to the uses of technology in society. In my view, Kipnis's work has not received the attention it deserves. But of course powerholders, and those seeking their favour, are hardly likely to take up research on the corrupting force of having power.

Dacher Keltner adds to this picture with much new empirical evidence. He presents the intriguing idea that people grant power to others because of their desirable behaviours, only to have their trust violated when those

10 Melvin J. Lerner, *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion* (New York: Plenum, 1980); Leo Montada and Melvin J. Lerner, eds., *Responses to Victimizations and Belief in a Just World* (New York: Plenum, 1998); Michael Ross and Dale T. Miller, eds., *The Justice Motive in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

granted power are corrupted by it. This is what Keltner calls the paradox of power.

Brian Klaas offers a cautionary note. He gives several reasons why power doesn't corrupt as much as it seems, for example because people with power have more opportunities to cause harm, and they may be subject to greater scrutiny. He raises a different concern: the people who are most corruptible are more likely to seek power. He suggests that those who are less susceptible to corruption should be selected for power positions. When a position is advertised, it might be better to reject every applicant and choose someone who was reluctant to apply — they are probably less corruptible.

From an anarchist perspective, the corruptions of power provide an argument against hierarchical systems, against any way of organising human activities in which a few people have a great deal of power. Let's go back to the situation of Caroline Ambrus, who was a target of vengeful local officials. Or the situation of whistleblowers who suffer reprisals from management after they speak out about problems in their workplace. Can we imagine that a different way of organising society could avoid or lessen such abuses?

If local government were replaced by the anarchist alternative of self-managing groups, coordinated through federations, would abuses of power be reduced? It seems plausible. A system in which groups select delegates to serve on higher-level decision-making bodies is susceptible to the corruptions of power if these delegates retain their positions over extended periods. Other than this, it's not obvious whether problems such as those experienced by

Ambrus would be eliminated. Nor is it obvious that whistleblowing — speaking out in the public interest — would be risk-free. Today, in egalitarian activist groups, it can be difficult to challenge abuses, due to informal power systems.

Klaas accepts hierarchies and argues that positions of authority should be filled by people who are less corruptible — many of whom would be reluctant to pursue such positions. In all my reading about anarchist systems, in theory and practice, I haven't seen anyone tackle the challenge of how to choose decision-makers who are less corruptible.

Random selection seems to offer a solution. When decision-makers are chosen by lot, power-seekers, the ones who are more corruptible, have no better chance of success than those who are meek and retiring.[11] How this would work out in practice remains to be seen, but one thing seems obvious: those currently in positions of power, or seeking these positions, are probably more corruptible than others.

Dilemmas

It's nice to imagine that social arrangements are possible to limit the abuses of power. That gives hope that there are alternatives to present-day systems. And it offers a guide for what to do now: support power-limiting alternatives, such as limited terms of office, delegate systems with easy recall mechanisms, random selection, and rotating leadership roles. That's fine. But what about dealing with, interacting with, today's hierarchical systems? What are the risks and benefits of engaging with the beast?

11 See the chapter on self-management.

Should you get involved in local electoral politics, running for office or supporting a trusted comrade who does? What about the danger of gaining power and being corrupted by it?

If you know someone who is charismatic, with the best progressive views, someone who could really make a difference, do you support them to seek a position of power? Are they one of those who are less corruptible? Maybe you and others support this charismatic individual who seems to have all the right instincts, but see them changing as they rise in the system. What then?

Imagine that you work in a traditional workplace, where there are bosses and subordinates. You are offered a promotion, which means you'll be officially in charge of several other workers, or maybe a big team. You believe in empowering workers and have studied and practised how to do this, so you think you can make a difference in your new role. Just to be sure, you ask some of your friends, ones who share your views, whether you'll be changed if you accept the promotion and become a boss, an enlightened one. They say you'll still be committed to your ideals. Do you take the new role? How do you make sure you won't be seduced by the power you'll be able to exercise?

Another question. Do you know anyone who has been offered a promotion and who asked you whether they would be changed for the worse by taking it? I don't. Not many people think that power corrupts when it comes to them. So how do we start making more people aware of the problems with systems of power, how they change people, and how to avoid or counter these problems?

11
Self-management

In an anarchist society, how would decisions be made? Despite reading many books and articles about anarchism, I've never found a concise explanation, or a definitive one. Nevertheless, it's possible to piece together a picture.

The easiest place to start is the workplace. Getting rid of bosses, the workers make decisions collectively. This is called workers' control or workers' self-management.[1]

Imagine a small workplace, with ten or twenty workers. They can get together in a meeting, discuss matters and, with some luck, reach agreements about who does what, how to choose new workers (or how to reduce their numbers if need be), who gets paid what, and so on.

There are precedents. There are episodes of workers' control during revolutionary times, most famously the 1936–1939 Spanish revolution. And there are a few enterprises where employees run the operation. Maybe we

1 Gerry Hunnius, G. David Garson and John Case (eds.), *Workers' Control: A Reader on Labor and Social Change,* (New York: Vintage, 1973); Ness, Immanuel and Dario Azzellini, eds., *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2011); Ernie Roberts, *Workers' Control,* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973); Daniel Zwerdling, *Workplace Democracy: A Guide to Workplace Ownership, Participation and Self-Management in the United States and Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

can set these aside for now and look at a bigger issue. What happens when the company, the enterprise, is big? How are decisions made when there are a thousand employees, or ten thousand?

Delegates and federations

Here's where a standard picture emerges: delegates and federations. To coordinate decision-making, imagine ten groups of ten workers. Each group chooses a "delegate" to represent its interests and concerns. The ten delegates from the ten groups get together to make decisions.

Here's the trick about delegates. They can be recalled by the members of their group if they aren't doing what the group wanted. In this, they are different from elected representatives. Politicians, after being elected, can vote as they like, even going against what they promised.

In some places, politicians can be recalled, following a process of collecting signatures and holding a sort of referendum. It's difficult, which is why we rarely hear about it. In conventional politics, voters have little power over their representatives except voting against them at the next election.

Anarchists see delegates as different. There's another difference. Delegates usually represent a fairly small group, say ten or a hundred. That makes it harder for the delegate to act against the group's mandate.

What then, about larger populations, like a million or ten million? This is where the anarchist idea of federations comes in. A federation is just a group of groups, with the different groups interacting cooperatively.

Groups in the federation would cooperate with each other, but each one would be autonomous. The delegates would meet and make decisions, but these decisions would not be binding.

This sounds all very nice, but would it work in practice? There are some examples that show promise. Consider amateur chamber musicians: people who play classical music in small ensembles for their own pleasure, for example in string quartets or woodwind quintets. The Amateur Chamber Music Players is an organisation that facilitates musicians meeting each other, and produces a directory of people around the world interested in playing and hosting others. This has always been an amicable operation.

Two things make amateur chamber music mostly immune to serious power struggles. One is that amateur musicians are unpaid; there's no money at stake. Another is that everyone is a volunteer, doing it because they want to; there's no coercion.

Consider the game of chess. There are chess clubs in communities around the world, and most countries have chess federations with their clubs as members, and the national federations are part of an international federation. So far as amateur members are concerned, this all operates cooperatively, much like amateur musicians, but there is something else. Chess is a competitive game. Being a winner brings status, and at the highest level both fame and money are on offer. Politicking is most serious at international events. Furthermore, there are national teams, and some governments seek status via the prowess of their teams. The saving grace is that there isn't all that much

money involved. A few individuals can make a living as professional chess players, but most remain amateurs.

Comparing amateur chamber music and chess — well, that's the wrong comparison. A better comparison is between amateur chamber music and *amateur* chess, and between professional chamber music and professional chess. When people do something for money and fame, the dynamic changes. It becomes more competitive, more ruthless, and often less enjoyable.

Back to the anarchist vision of self-management. Is it more like a voluntary, non-professional activity, or one where money and fame beckon?

In nearly every political system, those at the top of the political hierarchy earn a lot more than those at the bottom, a lot more than the average income. And there's something else. Political power can be a tool for enrichment. Think of dictators who acquire vast fortunes, with billions of dollars in offshore accounts. Even in countries with fair elections, top politicians have generous salaries, and many of them receive plush jobs after their term of office. How often have we heard about a plumber or nurse who becomes a parliamentarian and afterwards returns to plumbing or nursing?

In a system based on delegates and federations, there is a risk that some delegates will use their position for advantage. Being a delegate means having access to more information and decision-making power, which can be used to argue for continuing in the position, so being recalled becomes ever less likely.

In not a single political system around the world are elected representatives restricted to a single short term of office. Instead, for most positions, elected representatives

gain name recognition (a degree of fame, locally or more widely) and access to funds that can be used for campaigning. The result is that re-election becomes easier. It is a rare politician who promises to serve only a single term and fulfils that commitment.

For a system of delegates and federations, there may be solutions to the potential problems of delegates cementing their positions and using them for personal advantage. Indeed, I'm sure there must be solutions, for example restricting delegates to a short term in their positions, and rotating the position on a regular basis. It worried me that I couldn't find discussions about the problems in writings about anarchism. This led me to be open to other options.

Random selection

While working at the Australian National University in the late 1970s, I got to know two dissident academics there: Fred and Merrelyn Emery. They worked in the Centre for Continuing Education, one of the few places where radical ideas flourished. Fred had a background in researching industrial democracy in Scandinavia, with some other pioneers in this research field like Einar Thorsrud. Fred was an unusual fellow, pursuing ideas about politics and work, presenting them in a way that seemed to me, at the time, to be both profound and enigmatic. He had never finished high school or undergraduate studies, going straight on to a PhD. I learned that he was the most highly cited sociologist in Australia. Yet he offended higher-ups at the university and failed to obtain tenure.

One idea that Fred developed was random selection. To select a decision-making group in a workplace, he used

a "deep slice," with members chosen from all levels of the hierarchy.[2]

Using random selection deals neatly with some of the problems with representatives. One of the problems is that a representative gains experience, connections and credibility, and becomes a better choice the next time. When voting is used to choose representatives, the same people tend to stay in office, for years or decades. It is rational for voters to keep electing their experienced politician. When representatives are chosen randomly, the process starts over every time.

Another problem is that elected representatives have a mandate. They seem to have the endorsement of the electorate. Being elected is so easily treated as deserved that even dictatorships hold elections in which the results are rigged. The process, even when biased, still gives politicians extra credibility. But when representatives are chosen randomly, they don't have the same cachet of deserving their role. They are there just by chance.

This is apparent in court juries. Commonly, a jury is selected for just one trial. Being a juror for previous trials doesn't mean having a better chance of becoming one again, because it's a random process. It doesn't matter that experience might make a juror better, because being chosen by lot is more important. And it's important because the jury

2 F. E. Emery, *Toward Real Democracy and Toward Real Democracy: Further Problems* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Labour, 1989); Merrelyn Emery (ed.), *Participative Design for Participative Democracy* (Canberra: Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, 1989).

needs to be seen as independent, as not easily corruptible. If jurors were permanent and received a salary, like judges, they would have a stake in remaining in the job and could be threatened or bribed over a period of years. This is not so easy when jurors are chosen for just one trial, and immediately afterwards return to their previous occupation, neighbourhoods and activities.

For these sorts of reasons, I was attracted to the idea of random selection, also known as sortition or the lot system. But how could it be used on a wider scale? This wasn't something I thought about until reading a book titled *Is Democracy Possible?* A colleague of mine, a philosopher named Harry Beran, told me about the book, thinking I might be interested. I was.[3]

The author was John Burnheim, a philosopher working at the University of Sydney. Burnheim recognised the many problems with electoral systems, and for an alternative turned to ancient Greek democracies, of which Athenian democracy is best known.[4] In ancient Athens, some decisions were made collectively, in an assembly of all male citizens. That alone seemed analogous to anarchists' idea of self-management. But this wasn't what interested Burnheim. It was something else. The ancient

3 John Burnheim, *Is Democracy Possible? The Alternative to Electoral Politics* (London: Polity, 1985).

4 Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles and Ideology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Greeks chose most of their public officials randomly, using a device called the kleroterion.

One of the challenges in ancient Athens was competition between its ten tribes. For some decision-making bodies, one out of every ten members was chosen from each tribe. It's what we would today call stratified sampling. Imagine that in a modern jury, it was important to have equal numbers of men and women, or one third from an ethnic group comprising one third of the population, or whatever. It's easy to do. Just select half the jurors randomly from the male population and half from females. The same principle can be used with ethnic groups, ages, occupations or anything else for which a proportional sample would apply.

Today, in most parliaments around the world, there are more men than women. More strikingly, there are more wealthy people than poor ones, more lawyers than carpenters, and more graduates of elite universities than those with fewer degrees. Random selection, using stratified sampling, could address any of these disproportions.

Burnheim was attracted by the lot system, because it seemed like a solution to the corruptions associated with popular elections, leading to entrenched systems of power. But how can random selection be scaled up?

In a small group, it's fine to make decisions by consensus, or by voting, because members know each other, and there is local accountability. There are many problems in small-group decision-making, but also many creative ways of dealing with them. The bigger challenge is coordinating decision-making for larger numbers of people. The solution proposed by anarchists historically is federations, as discussed. Burnheim proposed a different approach.

Imagine a community of tens of thousands of people. Let's call it a town. The usual idea is for a small group of individuals to make town-wide decisions. They are the local government. In a dictatorship, they hold power through force, persuasion or tradition, perhaps installed from higher up. In a representative government, they are chosen in elections. In a federative system, they are delegates chosen by self-managing groups, and their decisions are not binding, and they can be recalled by their groups.

What all these models have in common is that the small group deals with all the issues confronting the town: industry, commerce, transportation, education, health and so on. This puts a huge burden on the decision-makers in the small group. Somehow they have to learn about a wide range of issues and take into account the wishes and concerns of community members. There's another problem. Having this sort of decision-making power makes them susceptible to corruption.

Burnheim's idea was to break up decision-making domains. Instead of one group making decisions about all issues, there would be different groups, for example one for industry, one for transport and so forth. Burnheim called them functional groups, because each one would deal with a function.

There's an analogy with court juries. Each jury deals with just one case. They learn a lot about it, enough to make an informed decision. And then the jury is disbanded.

Burnheim's picture thus involves two features different from the usual models of decision-making. One: random selection. Two: functional groups. He coined a new name for a system with these features: demarchy.

Consider the functional group dealing with education. Its members would be chosen randomly from volunteers, with a limited term in office, maybe one or two years. Burnheim envisaged a process of gradually replacing some group members, so new ones could learn from more experienced ones.

There's more to Burnheim's picture, but for now, just consider the two key features of random selection and functional groups. I thought it had promise — theoretically. But having attractive features is not enough. I already knew about alternatives to conventional democracy.

Quite a few people have written books about such alternatives. And there's more. Others have written unpublished manuscripts, short and long, which they circulate to anyone they think would be interested. Few people ever hear about these ideas — except for those who write about democracy. My friend Lyn Carson, a prominent advocate for deliberative democracy, receives them all the time.

Even back in the late 1980s, I had an inkling about this. It's great to have ideas about alternatives. But will they work in practice? I thought Burnheim's model was promising, but wondered whether there was any empirical support for it. He didn't mention any. His book *Is Democracy Possible?* is elegant in its abstract purity, but didn't provide evidence for the viability of demarchy. Well, he had the examples of ancient Greek democracies. Could they be relevant today?

I started looking for empirical work on random selection, and soon discovered it. In West Germany — this was before the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany — an academic researcher named Peter Dienel

was carrying out experiments with "planning cells." He would bring together 25 citizens, chosen randomly, to study a contentious issue, such as energy policy, and try to reach a consensus viewpoint. A lot of the writing about planning cells was in German — notably a book — but there was enough in English for me to be excited.[5] Yes, randomly selected citizens can understand complex issues and work together to reach sensible proposals.

In the US, in Minnesota, there was a different researcher, Ned Crosby. Using inherited wealth, he ran what he initially called "policy juries."[6] A typical jury had 12 members, chosen randomly from the local population, and assigned the task of coming up with a policy about a currently contentious issue, like polluted run-off from farms. The jury would hear from experts on each side of the

5 P. C. Dienel, *Die Planungszelle: Eine Alternative zur Establishment-demokratie* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1978; second edition, 1988). See, in English, Peter C. Dienel, "Contributing to social decision methodology: citizen reports on technological projects," in Charles Vlek and George Cvetkovich (eds.), *Social Decision Methodology for Technological Projects* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), pp. 133–151.

6 Ned Crosby, "Citizens juries: one solution for difficult environmental questions," in Ortwin Renn, Thomas Webler and Peter Wiedemann (eds.), *Fairness and Competence in Citizen Participation* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1995), pp. 157–174; Ned Crosby and Doug Nethercut, "Citizens juries: creating a trustworthy voice for the people," in John Gastil and Peter Levine (eds.), *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the Twenty-first Century* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), pp. 111–119.

issue, and discuss their views, deliberating until they reached a consensus. An important part of the process was facilitation of discussion by independent, non-participating experts — experts in facilitation. These might be considered analogous to electoral commissions, whose role is to ensure fair elections.

Burnheim hadn't known about the work of Dienel and Crosby; indeed, Dienel and Crosby hadn't known about each other's work. For me, the combination was encouraging, even inspiring. Burnheim had presented a big-picture alternative, and it turned out there was empirical work showing that a crucial component of the alternative was viable. Namely, randomly selected groups of citizens could come together, learn about a complex issue, deliberate and arrive at sensible resolutions. This was more than viable. Crosby reported that most jurors were excited to participate. For some, it was one of the most meaningful experiences of their life. Who knew? When citizens participate in making decisions about important matters, they take it very seriously, and they can overcome differences. It's everything that anarchists had been saying, in a practical setting.

There were a couple of things missing. Planning cells and policy juries had no power. Dienel and Crosby were experimenting with a form of participatory democracy, but it wasn't here yet. Governments weren't about to cede any of their powers to citizens, selected randomly or otherwise. Nevertheless, some of the juries were influential, via publicity about their deliberations.

Another thing missing was a path towards implementing a wider use of random selection and — my special interest — demarchy. Dienel and Crosby were pioneers in

showing the feasibility of citizens directly participating in decision-making in contemporary societies. As it turned out, their hopes have been realised, although slowly and unevenly. Since their initial experiments, there has been a flowering of interest in promoting direct citizen participation, especially using random selection. Typically called citizens juries (or citizens' juries), they have been tried out in several countries. Even more impressively, in some cases, they have been influential in policy-making. In British Columbia, Canada, a jury examined alternative parliamentary models. Its recommended model was narrowly defeated in a popular vote. The important thing is that the process was widely respected. The Irish parliament has adopted several proposals recommended by citizens juries.

There has also been increasing interest in using random selection in other domains. In the Netherlands, many students want to become doctors, more than there are places in medical schools. Rather than select those with the best scores on entrance exams or the best high school results, as done in other countries, there is a modified lottery. Any applicant with scores good enough for admission is put in a lottery; those with higher scores have, in essence, more tickets in the lottery. Unsuccessful applicants can try again the next year. Someone I met was successful in getting into dental school on her third try. The Dutch system recognises that becoming a good professional is more than doing well on exams, which do not pick up relevant personality traits. One of them is persistence.

Despite the resurgence of interest in random selection, within anarchist circles there seems to be little interest in it.

The idea of federations remains dominant, true to anarchist tradition.

My view is more along the lines of experimentation. We do not know all the possible ways humans can organise themselves without formal hierarchies, and to me it makes sense to try various ways to do it and see what works. Federations of self-managing communities is one possibility. Demarchy is another. So is Gandhi's vision of village democracy.[7]

Even saying this raises a problem. It's not enough to try something for a short time, because social arrangements require fine-tuning. Think of electoral systems. Initially, voting was restricted to landed gentry, with women and working-class men excluded. Over many decades, the franchise was expanded. There has also been the challenge of electoral boundaries, voting systems (for example, single-member electorates or multi-member electorates), the number of chambers (typically two, senate and house of representatives), and all sorts of details such as the size of

7 The Gandhian ideal of village democracy and economic self-reliance, called sarvodaya, fundamentally rejects capitalist economics. Gandhi described it: "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world." Quoted in Kunal Roy Chowdhuri, "Gandhi's theory of sarvodaya socialism," *Gandhi Marg,* vol. 15, no. 1, April-June 1993, pp. 62–77, at p. 66. I compared sarvodaya, anarchism, demarchy and voluntaryism in chapter 5 of *Nonviolence versus Capitalism* (London: War Resisters' International, 2001).

parliaments, salaries, staffing, and rules on campaigning. Then there's corruption, including buying votes, and ways to counter it. Today's electoral systems are not the result of a grand plan but instead of continual revision and contestation.

The same would apply to any alternative. Demarchy is Burnheim's idea, but how it might operate in practice will only become apparent after years of trial and error. So far, this process has hardly started, with citizens juries showing the viability of one aspect of demarchy. The same can be said of self-management in the anarchist tradition. There are many powerful examples of societies without the state, but for stable arrangements in the contemporary world, much remains to be learned.

Challenges

There are two aspects to self-management as an anarchist alternative: vision and practice. The usual anarchist vision is clear enough: self-managing collectives whose activities are coordinated through delegates and federations. And there's an associated practice, most apparent during periods of revolution.

The challenge is to be open to other visions and other practices. Burnheim's idea of demarchy is one vision, but the closest thing to a sustained practice was ancient Greek democracies, with all their flaws. But there is also the expanding experience with citizens juries.

In both cases, ordinary people show a great capacity to work together and to make decisions in the common good. That is encouraging.

The big challenge is to turn these alternatives into sustained practices, as models of larger-scale self-management, not as final solutions but as experimental operations, for learning how to do better, to fine-tune methods that work and are resilient in the face of attack.

Then there's the additional challenge of exploring other models and testing new alternatives made possible by communication technologies. There is much to learn, and it's a huge challenge.

12
Technology

Is there an anarchist approach to technology? If so, what does it mean for practice?

Such questions have been on my mind at least since 1976, when I joined the Australian campaign against uranium mining and nuclear power. Most people who opposed nuclear power were concerned about reactor accidents — like the ones later in Chernobyl in 1986 and Fukushima in 2011 — and long-lived radioactive waste. These are important, to be sure, but my main concern was about nuclear technology and its link with political repression. A future energy system built around nuclear power would cement repressive political control.[1]

More on this later. Nuclear power is one technology. What about others? Is it possible to make generalisations? I had plenty of opportunities to think about these questions because in 1986 I ended up as an academic at the University of Wollongong, in the Department of Science and Technology Studies, called STS for short. There are STS units in quite a few countries, devoted to teaching and researching the social aspects of science and technology. This includes the history of science, philosophy of science, sociology of science, politics of technology, economics of innovation, and various other permutations.

1 A classic account of nuclear power's threat to civil liberties is Robert Jungk, *The New Tyranny: How Nuclear Power Enslaves Us* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1979).

For most people, "technology" refers to objects, like computers and aircraft. In STS, we use a slightly different terminology. The objects are called "artefacts," whereas "technology" refers to the combination of artefacts and their processes by which they are designed, built and used. It includes the "labour process," namely the systems by which workers have tasks to help produce artefacts.

"Technology" often brings to mind complex systems like phones and cars, especially information and communication technology. But much more is included, for example toothpicks, shoes, bricks, pharmaceutical drugs, chairs and hamburgers, basically anything that is constructed by humans. I'm not going to be fussy about the use of the word "technology." The point is that it covers a wider range of things and processes than people usually think of. In an urban environment, it can be hard to find things that aren't constructed. Maybe trees, insects and the air, and your own body, though your body may be a hybrid of manufactured and organic materials. Think of tooth fillings, tattoos, stents and hair colouring. Even trees may not be natural, having been modified by genetic processes that might be considered part of human technology. In this sense, technology includes processes, like manufacturing and genetic engineering, as well as objects (namely, artefacts).

Onwards to some standard ideas about technology. One of them is that technology can't be stopped. The saying, "You can't stop progress" usually refers to technological change. I can't remember hearing anyone say this when they meant progress in human compassion or partici-

patory decision-making. When people say technology can't be stopped, they are probably thinking about things like cars, buildings and computers — and nuclear power. Saying "You can't stop progress" is a form of resignation or an arrogant assertion that one's preferences are superior.

"Progress" is a loaded term. It might be progress that people have nice clothes, but maybe not so good for workers in sweatshops. It might be progress to have advanced manufacturing, but maybe not so good if it wrecks the environment. What about microplastics and fluorocarbons — are they progress?

Anyway, the statement isn't true. The supersonic transport aircraft (SST) was stopped. It was built: the Soviet Tupolev Tu-144 and the British-French Concorde entered service. But neither achieved acceptance. The planned fleets of hundreds of SSTs were never built. Popular opposition was crucial in stopping this technology.

We might also think of weapons that were never built, thank goodness. One in particular was horrific: the cobalt bomb, a thermonuclear weapon padded with the element cobalt that would cover the earth with a deadly and long-lived cobalt isotope.

The idea that technology can't be stopped is called technological determinism.[2] In STS classes, my colleagues went to great lengths to discredit it, instead presenting the view that the way that technologies are created, manufactured, adapted and used always involves human choices.

2 Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (eds.), *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

Furthermore, powerful groups — governments, corporations, militaries — have the greatest influence over technological developments. One perspective along these lines is called the "social shaping of technology."[3] For example, kitchen appliances, video players and automatic weapons are not necessarily the most effective or low-cost. The ways they evolve are influenced by corporate strategies and bureaucratic machinations.

There's another common idea, and I've never understood why people believe it. It's that technology is neutral, neither good nor bad. Why do people think this? Perhaps because some technologies can be used for different purposes. A gun can be used for murder or to defend against attack. A phone can be used to organise a meeting or make a threat. And a toilet bowl can be used as an art object. Well, yes. But this doesn't mean they are equally easy to use for different purposes. A toothpick can be used to pick at your teeth but it's not very helpful for brain surgery. A nuclear weapon can be used for destruction or threats, but it's not very useful as a paperweight. It's obvious that any given artefact is easier to use for some purposes than others. I call it "selective usefulness."

People, every day, take this into account. A carpenter knows which screwdriver to use for which purpose, and an auditor knows which accounting system. Technologies aren't neutral. They are designed for specific purposes, sometimes narrow and sometimes broad, but they can't be

3 Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman (eds.), *The Social Shaping of Technology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1999).

used for anything. Even the computer, an amazingly versatile technology, is not much good for digging ditches.

If technologies are selectively useful, then it's sensible to choose and promote technologies compatible with your values. For anarchists, this means using technologies that facilitate self-management and opposing ones that enable domination. The opposing part is often easier to figure out. Nuclear weapons are a tool of domination, so they should be opposed.

Nuclear *power* is also a tool of domination, but perhaps this is not so obvious. Nuclear power is a way to produce electricity with minimal greenhouse gas emissions, so maybe it should be in the energy-production mix. The trouble is that nuclear power is a centralised technology, highly dangerous if an accident occurs, and a potential military or terrorist target. It's an ideal technology for a strong state, because it requires experts to run it, and police to protect it. If your community comes under attack, a nuclear facility is a major vulnerability. Dispersed solar collectors and energy-efficient systems are not.

An analysis like this can be undertaken of other technologies. From an anarchist point of view, few technologies are as simple to assess as nuclear weapons and nuclear power. Let's take one that is highly contentious: vaccines. Proponents say they are one of the greatest boons to human health in history. Critics say that some or all of them may cause more harm than good. What to do? Support vaccines because nearly all medical authorities support them? Or be sceptical because they are backed by the powerful pharmaceutical industry?

It's not a resolution to say that a deeper examination is needed, because with controversial technologies, the arguments go on and on. Furthermore, facts and values are mixed together and can't be separated. The vaccination debate is not just about whether vaccines are beneficial overall — and even that is a matter for debate — but also about individual vaccines, whether they should be mandatory, when they should be administered and what to do when there's an outbreak of infectious disease. Should hepatitis B vaccine be given at birth even though only some adults are likely to be exposed to hepatitis? Is it okay for parents to ask for their young children to receive some but not all of the recommended vaccines? Let's come back to these sorts of questions after looking at some perspectives on technological choice.

Alternative technology

In the 1970s, the idea of "appropriate technology" or AT surfaced. It was inspired by the circumstances of poor people in poor countries, what were then called the Third World. For poor people in rural villages, nuclear power was not a solution: it didn't serve their needs. Instead, advocates for Third World empowerment looked to simpler technologies, like biogas generators and micro-hydro plants, that could be constructed and/or repaired by the people who used them. They required relatively little capital to build, were easy on the environment, relied on people's skills, and made communities more self-reliant.

Instead of massive engineering projects like huge dams and industrial agriculture relying on genetically engineered crops, artificial fertilisers and herbicides, AT

offered a different vision, one that put people, the users of technology, in the forefront. Was it really as good as its promise?

I was greatly impressed by one of the earliest critiques of AT, a book by journalist David Dickson, *Alternative Technology and the Politics of Technical Change,* and took pages of notes about it — especially the parts about technical change. Dickson argued that technology promotes the interests of dominant social groups, and the nature of technology is determined in part by the structure and distribution of power in the society in which it is developed and used. This was a frontal challenge to the usual ideas about technology.[4]

I've mentioned technological determinism, the idea that technologies drive the way society develops. Closely related is economic determinism, in which technologies are the most efficient way to do things, in terms of cost and function. Dickson challenged both of these ideas, instead coming close to "determined technology," the idea that technologies develop in a way that serves those with the most power. This happens, Dickson argued, in two domains. One is the material domain, the practical functions of manufacturing, transport, telecommunications and so forth. The other is the ideological domain, the domain of ideas about how the world works, including the individual's place in the world.

Dickson wrote at a pretty abstract level, until he came to discuss "alternative technology." This includes appropriate technology (AT) and what was then called "intermediate technology," which means technology appropriate to the situation of developing economies. There was yet another term, "soft technology." Dickson grouped them in a wider category of "utopian technology," which is ecologically sound and serves non-material needs. Dickson was sceptical. When promoted in the Third World, he saw intermediate technology as a form of imperialism — at least when it was separate from the need for political change.

4 David Dickson, *Alternative Technology and the Politics of Technical Change* (London: Fontana, 1974).

You might think of it this way. Technological determinism is the idea that technologies determine their own trajectory. The idea behind introducing AT, intermediate technology, whatever you call it, is that it will lead to better outcomes. This might seem like a variant of technological determinism. Dickson said no, the politics comes first. Change society directly and don't expect a new technology to do it for you.

Around the same time that Dickson was writing his book, there was a collective in Britain promoting alternative technology from an anarchist point of view. I knew about it via the magazine *Undercurrents,* and was in touch with one of the editors, Godfrey Boyle. He wrote a book titled *Living on the Sun.* It was an approach to energy based explicitly on decentralisation, low technology and self-management. He wrote, "it is entirely possible for the industrial nations of the world to terminate their dependence on non-renewable

sources of energy and to create a gentler, fairer, more ecologically conscious civilisation …"[5]

Boyle looked at what was possible. He said, for example, British industry could cut energy use through conservation schemes, getting rid of unnecessary packaging and goods, making goods that lasted and using low-energy materials. No doubt this was possible, though none of it happened at the time, and not much subsequently.

Boyle recognised that corporations would try to control renewable energy sources but thought it would be more difficult for them to exploit solar power than fossil fuels. Nevertheless, he said the shape of the energy system was influenced both by characteristics of the technology and by the social, political and economic system. His view took in elements of David Dickson's politics of technical change, but saw a path forward in decentralised renewable energy systems under local control. This vision was made more explicit in a book titled *Radical Technology,* filled with material about technology suitable for local self-reliance in a British context. One of the highlights of *Radical Technology* was cartoons by Cliff Harper portraying self-reliant communities with backyard gardens, self-constructed houses and local wind power. Yet Harper in these visions of utopian contemporary communities remains acutely aware of the tensions involved in living this

5 Godfrey Boyle, *Living on the Sun: Harnessing Renewable Energy for an Equitable Society* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1975), p. 9.

dream while forsaking the attractions of high-technology society — like junk food.[6]

The vision of utopian technology supporting an alternative lifestyle remains attractive in some circles, but it has not proved attractive to most of the population. Meanwhile, new technologies, promoted by corporations and governments, have proliferated: phones, pharmaceutical drugs, genetically modified crops, artificial intelligence, and many sophisticated police and military tools for violence and social control. It seems that a vision of a more harmonious and self-reliant alternative is not enough to mobilise resistance to a future of ever-greater inequality of power and wealth.

Reacting is not enough

One of the problems is that activists are mostly on the defensive, opposing harmful technologies but having difficulty taking the initiative. Nuclear power is an example. It was developed as an outgrowth of nuclear weapons programmes from the 1940s and 1950s, and was introduced in several countries before citizens became alarmed about its implications and started campaigning against it. The same sequence is repeated in issue after issue, for example pesticides, freeways, coal and oil, and genetically engineered crops.

The problem stems from the lack of citizen participation in technological choice and development. By the time technologies are on the market, being taken up by

6 Godfrey Boyle, Peter Harper and the editors of *Undercurrents* (eds.), *Radical Technology* (London: Wildwood House, 1976).

employers and consumers, it is too late to make a big difference: the technologies are already embedded in people's lives. Stopping technologies after they've become entrenched is a mammoth task. It is difficult enough with nuclear power, which people don't use day-to-day, except remotely by using electricity. It is far more difficult with everyday technologies, like clothes, food and phones.

For decades, there has been attention in some policy circles to citizen participation in technological choice. Rather than technologies being designed and marketed and only then examined, the idea is that citizens would be involved, in some way, in the earlier stages. This could be by having citizen representatives sitting on company boards or embedded in design teams. It could be by requiring new technologies, in the proposal or development stage, to be assessed by citizen panels. Or, more radically, it could be by the entire process being under the control of workers and citizens. That is an anarchist model.

There have been some steps in this direction. There used to be a US government body, the Office of Technology Assessment, that carefully examined technologies; it offered a counter to pressures from corporations. However, it was abolished. Then there a more ambitious body in Denmark, the Danish Board of Technology, which has sponsored citizen panels for technology assessment. Elsewhere, there seem to be few government initiatives to promote people's input into technological developments.

Think of pharmaceutical drugs. Most of them are developed by companies, marketed and sold, with some government regulations to manage risk. Citizen input is limited. People have little or no say in the priorities for drug

development, which can explain why treatments for common diseases among the world's poor are neglected.

There have been eloquent arguments for citizen participation. For me, a highlight was Richard Sclove's 1995 book *Democracy and Technology.*[7] Its arguments are good, but it seems that arguments aren't enough. Since then, social media has exploded on the scene, capturing people's attention. Where were there opportunities for citizen input into the choice and design of apps or the role of advertising? It's easy to imagine that the contemporary digital scene would look quite different if groups of citizens had had a major say in how things developed.

To pull together these threads, technology has become an ever-present part of human activity, from clothes to AI. Every technology was created by humans, usually for specific purposes. It's useful to think of technologies as shaped, namely influenced, by the societies in which they are developed and used. If society were organised differently, its technologies would be different.[8] So it's plausible to speak of anarchist technologies, or perhaps anarchist-influenced or anarchist-supportive technologies, though what they would look like will depend on the people who choose and use them.

This is all very good at an abstract level, but what it means day-to-day is another matter. Some technologies are

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7 Richard E. Sclove, *Democracy and Technology* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).

8 Brian Martin, "Technology in different worlds," *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society,* vol. 18, no. 5, 1998, pp. 333–339.

dangerous politically, helping rulers to dominate, and should be opposed. This includes most weapons and technological systems that can be centrally controlled. As well as opposing technologies of repression and oppression, anarchists can support technologies that facilitate self-management, such as free software and small-scale decentralised solar power. In acting in such directions, anarchists can find common cause with digital activists and environmentalists.

Dilemmas

Do anarchists bring any special insights to technology issues? Specifically, are there any insights into how to promote citizen participation in the initial stages of technological choice and innovation? Anarchists presumably would want people from all walks of life to be involved. What's the way forward towards this goal? Is this an issue for after the revolution, or is it part of the process?

Right now, there's an everyday issue that is continually challenging. Let's say you've assessed current technologies and decided that some are more suitable for a self-managed society than others. Should you use any of the technologies that probably would be rejected? Perhaps you favour town planning giving a priority for walking and cycling, with the private car subordinated. Should you own a car? Should you even be in a car?

Perhaps you favour strong controls on the use of fossil fuels, and you know that flying is one of the most energy-intensive forms of transport. Should you ever consider aeroplane travel? Maybe you favour free software as the ideal for anarchist alternatives. Should you ever use

proprietary software? Should you use commercial banks and credit cards? If there is a local currency, should you use it whenever possible, or only when convenient?

These are questions concerning purity. Living the alternative is a fundamental anarchist principle, called prefiguration, but it's not always possible. There's a trade-off between being purist and being pragmatic. There's no easy answer. Trying to live the alternative can provide a model for others but it can also make them feel inadequate for not measuring up. This tension is especially acute in campaigning groups, for example climate action and animal liberation. Is it better to insist on purity or to be tolerant of compromise? Maybe you should ask the AI assistant on your phone!

13
Violence and the state

This is a topic that's difficult for me to write about. That's because I've been pursuing certain angles for so long, which makes it challenging to present a balanced perspective. Actually, it's not violence and the state that's difficult, but rather the question of using violence against the state as a method of moving beyond the state.

In the early 1970s, I became familiar with anarchist perspectives, and with Marxist and other radical critiques of existing society. The idea that people could collectively organise their lives without domination, without concentrated power at the top, seemed attractive. But in my mind there was a serious gap. Living without domination, without the state, well that's fine, but what about opponents? What about armed opponents, with weapons and a willingness to use them?

Well, of course, one solution is to have your own arms, to be prepared to defend against attack. That's the usual military approach. But it sounded just like a continuation of the current system. Back then, I knew, or at least felt, that the state and the military were deeply intertwined, and they were prime causes of war. And war was a great evil. Surely, to create a free society, without domination, relying on arms and military training for defence seemed like playing with fire.

It was with this background that I came upon writing about nonviolent action, and suddenly found a solution to what had puzzled me for years.

What is violence?

Talking about violence can be confusing because it means different things to different people. Nearly everyone agrees that pulling out someone's fingernails is violence. Or do they?

Let's start by talking about different types of violence. There is physical violence, which includes beating, bombing and killing people. For example, hitting someone with a brick is physical violence. At least that's the way I like to think about it. So what's the problem?

Some people like to use the word "violence" to refer to other things. An example is verbal violence, which includes shouting and abusive comments. Why use the word "violence" to refer to words? Why not readily available descriptions like insult, slander and verbal abuse?

Johan Galtung is widely regarded as the world's foremost peace researcher. Author of over a hundred books and a huge number of articles, he introduced many penetrating ideas. I remember reading his book *The True Worlds,* which presents a framework for understanding world politics.[1] There is so much to learn from Galtung that it's hard to know where to start.

But when it comes to the concept of violence, I'm not so keen on Galtung's ideas. He introduced the idea of

1 Johan Galtung, *The True Worlds: A Transnational Perspective* (New York: Free Press, 1980).

"structural violence," which refers to political and economic structures, or systems, that systematically harm groups of people. For example, when trade relationships enrich one country at the expense of another — like when workers in Vietnam make running shoes, in terrible working conditions, that are sold in the US to affluent buyers while the company makes huge profits — Galtung calls this structural violence.

He also introduced the concept of "cultural violence," which refers to beliefs, stories, stereotypes, songs and other aspects of culture that make direct and structural violence seem justified. An example is belief in the superiority of a racial group.

What's the advantage of calling these types of violence? It emphasises that they are bad things. But for me, to apply the term violence to so many things can be confusing and misleading. If everything that causes harm is called violence, the word "violence" starts to be a catch-all term for anything bad, perhaps diminishing the power of the word.

Why not use other words, like oppression, exploitation, harm and damage? Then "violence" would more obviously refer to physical violence. As it is, Galtung's terminology is mainly used by a few scholars and activists. It has never caught on among the public.

There's another problem with the word violence. Many people think it only applies to those doing bad things, namely things they don't like. If you don't like protesters, or what they support, then police beating these protesters may not count as violence.[2]

For these reasons, my preference is to be specific, to talk about beatings or bombings rather than "violence." And, to be clear, to say that "violence" refers to physical violence.

Assassination as a road to liberty?

Can killing people be a means of liberation from repression, oppression and exploitation? In other words, can physical violence be a means of overcoming structural violence? Many people have believed so. Armed struggle against an oppressive government is a prime example. But let's look first at "propaganda by the deed."

From about 1880 through 1920, some anarchists used violence to promote their views, assassinating political leaders and exploding bombs in public places, killing members of the public. They called it "propaganda by the deed." It was a wave of terrorism. Other anarchists condemned this approach to social revolution.

Similar to using verbal or written messages to persuade others, propaganda by the deed uses actions, with

2 A revealing study, from decades ago, is Monica D. Blumenthal et al., *Justifying Violence: Attitudes of American Men* (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1972). The authors concluded that labelling something violence is a way of saying it is not good or necessary (p. 95). They laid out the semantic meaning of violence: bad, worthless, fierce, strong, necessary. "… American men tend to define acts of dissent as 'violence' when they perceived the dissenters as undesirable people" (p. 86).

the idea being to show what's possible and inspire others. It certainly did this, but with perverse effects. Assassinations and other physical violence by anarchists, or by people who called themselves anarchists, helped create the impression that anarchy is a synonym for mayhem and chaos. Propaganda by the deed turned out to be a message that anarchists are dangerous and must be stopped. Terrorist actions were counterproductive, doing nothing to bring about a social revolution.[3]

Propaganda by the deed gradually faded away, but the image of anarchists as violent insurrectionists persisted, aided by those who wanted to discredit anarchism. Some anarchists pushed back.

The famous anarchist Emma Goldman wrote an essay titled "The psychology of political violence," published in 1917, about anarchists being blamed for actions by individuals with no connection to anarchism. She said,

> That every act of political violence should nowadays be attributed to Anarchists is not at all surprising. Yet it is a fact known to almost everyone familiar with the Anarchist movement that a great number of acts, for which Anarchists had to suffer, either originated with the capitalist press or were instigated, if not directly perpetrated, by the police.[4]

3 An insightful treatment of this period in anarchist history is Constance Bantman, "The era of propaganda by the deed," in Carl Levy and Matthew S. Adams (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 371–387.

In 1979, an Australian anarchist group published a booklet titled *You Can't Blow Up a Social Relationship: The Anarchist Case against Terrorism.* It is a powerfully argued case against vanguardist violence, seeing it as provoking state repression while doing nothing to build the mass support needed for change. One of its examples is the Tupamaros in Uruguay, who perfected an urban guerrilla strategy, but it resulted in a highly repressive government: their strategy was flawed. The anonymous authors wrote, "The very essence of libertarian revolutionary strategy is the idea that there is an inextricable link between the means used and the ends proposed."[5] The title *You Can't Blow Up a Social Relationship* expresses the key idea: systems of power are maintained by relationships between people. Killing some of the people — specifically the ones at the top — doesn't by itself change the system of relationships. The authors gave five reasons to oppose terrorism and guerrilla insurgency: it is vanguardist, authoritarian, based on wrong ideas, involves killing that can't be justified, and results in repression or an authoritarian regime.

4 Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1969; first published, New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1917), p. 86.

5 *You Can't Blow Up a Social Relationship: The Anarchist Case against Terrorism* (San Francisco: See Sharp Press, 1990), p. 18. This is a reprint of the original.

When anarchists assassinated political leaders, this didn't alter the system by which a few people ruled over everyone else. It just meant that someone else replaced the assassinated leader, and why should they be any better than the one they replaced?

One assumption behind assassination as a political strategy is that people at the top hold power as a personal attribute. Get rid of them, and their power is gone. Get rid of all the dictators, all the capitalists, all the exploiters, and everyone will be free.

The trouble with this is that people in power don't have anything special except that they are in a *position* in which others obey, acquiesce or pay tribute. That's why assassination has never been a road to liberation. The individuals at the top are not the problem; it's the system enabling some individuals to be at the top.

The consent theory of power

Gene Sharp started out as a pacifist, a follower of Gandhi. Born in the US, he went to prison for refusing to join the army during the Korean War. Afterwards, he reconsidered his views. The pacifist position against violence is one based on ethics, that it is wrong to hurt other people. Sharp began arguing against violence for a different reason: that as a means to an end, it was less effective than what he called "nonviolent action."

Sharp was primarily concerned with war, dictatorship, repression and genocide. What's the best way to oppose these?

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, when Sharp was investigating this issue, many of those on the left looked to

armed struggle — including guerrilla warfare — as the path to liberation from repressive regimes. The Chinese revolution, led by Mao Tse-Tung, was the result of a long-running war against "nationalists." When Mao's troops defeated their opponents and took power in 1949, this was a model for other revolutionaries. In Cuba, Fidel Castro led a rebel force that toppled the Batista dictatorship in 1959. In Vietnam, the communists fought for decades before winning in 1975. It seemed that armed struggle was the road to liberation — except that the triumphant new rulers were repressive, just like the ones they replaced.

Sharp was also concerned about the problem of war. The usual approach, nearly everywhere, was to deal with the problem of war by preparing to go to war. "Defence" meant preparing to fight, usually with weapons systems that could also be used to attack, so one country's defence forces posed a threat to others. It was a system that thrived on exaggeration of threats. Worst of all, most military forces were never used for defence against foreign enemies. Instead, they oppressed their own people.

Sharp was inspired by a different approach to opposing dictatorship and war. He looked to campaigns in which people acted together, resisting, without using physical violence.

The most famous case was the struggle for Indian independence led by Gandhi. It lasted decades, but finally in 1947 India obtained independence from its colonial master, Great Britain. It was not an armed struggle. It was carried out by various forms of noncooperation.

Sharp was inspired by Gandhi, but he took a different path. Gandhi's opposition to using violence was based in

morals: he believed that no one should physically harm another human. Sharp developed a different rationale for not using violence, namely that methods of what he called "nonviolent action" could be more effective than physical violence.

Sharp, in his book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action,* is most famous for cataloguing 198 different methods of nonviolent action, giving historical examples of each one. These methods include signing petitions, holding rallies, going on strike, boycotting goods, sitting in lunch counters, and setting up alternative political systems. To make sense of such a diversity of methods, Sharp put them into three categories: protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention. Within each of these three categories, there are many sub-categories. For example, the category noncooperation includes numerous types of strikes by workers, producers, and governments. Among strikes by workers, there are stay-at-home strikes, work-to-rule strikes and many others.[6]

Sharp distinguished nonviolent action by saying it does not involve physical violence against humans. He excluded a powerful form of protest, self-immolation — burning yourself alive — because it involves violence against a human, namely the protester.

Sharp also distinguished nonviolent action by saying it's different from conventional political action, like voting and running for office. Voting doesn't involve violence and it's an action, so why doesn't it count as nonviolent action?

6 Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), part two.

This is a reasonable question. Sharp wanted to define nonviolent action a certain way, that's all. For him, it was everything between conventional political action and violence.

There's a problem with words here. "Nonviolent action" aims to define a form of action with a negative term, saying what it's not, namely not violent. Gandhi had a different term, satyagraha — literally, "truth force" — referring to the same actions and avoiding the confusion associated with "nonviolent action," but the term was seldom used outside India. The trouble with "nonviolent" is that it seems to include things like lobbying and having a conversation.

An important confusion involves methods of protest like petitions, marches and rallies. These are in Sharp's list as methods of protest and persuasion. However, there's a big difference between signing a petition in a place like Denmark, where it's routine, and signing a petition in North Korea, where it's seen as a threat to the regime. When Sharp described methods of protest and persuasion, he was thinking of them in places where they were risky.

The implication is that petitions, marches and rallies, when they are routine and don't pose any risk to participants, shouldn't be counted as methods of nonviolent action. They should be thought of as methods of conventional political action, like voting. However, Sharp didn't spell this out clearly, so activists might think, "Wow, we just had a rally. We're using nonviolent action." when actually they are not making a strong challenge.

But it all depends. In Australia, where civil liberties are supposedly valued, governments have clamped down on

protests, requiring police permission and forbidding assemblies in some places. In such circumstances, methods of protest and persuasion do indeed fit into Sharp's picture.

This is clearer when looking at what Sharp calls "the dynamics of nonviolent action." This is a set of elements or stages in nonviolent campaigns. Sharp examined lots of campaigns and came up with these elements or stages as part of what seemed like a typical pattern.

The first stage is "laying the groundwork for nonviolent action." This includes forming organisations, raising funds, building support and making plans. It's everything that challengers do before taking action. Sharp's second stage is "Challenge brings repression." The challenge — to a government, most commonly — is an open use of nonviolent action. Repression is the government's response, for example arresting, beating or jailing activists.

The next stage is maintaining nonviolent discipline. It's not really a stage but rather a guide or an imperative. Nonviolent discipline means not using violence when attacked or provoked. That can be hard to do, because many people, especially men, think that not fighting back is cowardly, even unmanly. Yet for nonviolent campaigns to succeed, not fighting back is often the key to success. That's because of the next stage, which Sharp called "political jiu-jitsu."

Jiu-jitsu is a fighting technique in which you attempt to use the opponent's force and momentum against them. They come at you furiously, but through careful techniques you cause them to overbalance and fall. Political jiu-jitsu is, by analogy, the same process in the political sphere. The police or troops attack protesters furiously, beating and

killing, but rather than defeating the protest movement, it is strengthened. How? Nearly everyone thinks it is unfair to beat or kill a person who is not resisting or causing any threat. It is seen as outrageous. Many of those who support the movement but were not active may decide to become involved. Some who were neutral beforehand may be repulsed by the one-sided violence and start supporting the movement. Even some of those opposed to the movement may question their position.

Sharp gave several examples of dramatic political jiu-jitsu, including the 1905 massacre in Russia that destabilised the Tsarist regime and the 1930 beatings at the culmination of the salt march in India that mobilised the Indian population against British rule. A case I like to use is the 1991 Dili massacre in East Timor, in which occupying Indonesian troops shot and killed hundreds of East Timorese mourners in Santa Cruz cemetery.[7] In none of these cases did the events lead to a sudden end to repressive rule, but they were key to the long-term success of challenger movements.

How is this relevant to anarchism? It speaks to anarchist strategy, specifically whether it needs to involve violence. To put this in context, among anarchists there are various positions.

A few contemporary anarchists argue for armed struggle against governments, along the lines of guerrilla warfare

7 Brian Martin, *Justice Ignited: The Dynamics of Backfire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), chapter 3.

or insurgent terrorism.[8] This strand has never had much support.

Another position is that anarchists should be willing to fight if they come under attack. This goes back to the Spanish anarchists in the 1930s, fighting against the fascists that were backed by Hitler. Vernon Richards, a key figure in Freedom Press which published my books, had written a book about the Spanish anarchists.[9] In our correspondence, he spoke of his position of being willing to fight to defend some future anarchist revolution.

More visible are those activists who join large protests and throw stones at police, break shop windows and perhaps use petrol bombs, otherwise known as Molotov cocktails. Some of them dress in black, covering their faces. Collectively they are known as black blocs. They are signalling, through their dress and their challenge to authority, that they are anarchists. Are they? Attacking the agents of the state and the buildings that are monuments to capitalism might seem anarchistic, in a destructive way. Others within anarchist movements see this type of action as damaging to the anarchist cause.[10]

8 One that I saw was written by Stuart Christie: International Revolutionary Solidarity Movement, First of May Group, *Towards a Citizens' Militia: Anarchist Alternatives to NATO and the Warsaw Pact* (Over the Water, Sanday, Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1980).

9 Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution (1936–1939)* (London: Freedom Press, 1953), with later editions in 1972 and 1983.

10 For a sophisticated discussion of the politics of black blocs, see Francis Dupuis-Déri, *Who's Afraid of the Black Blocs? Anarchy in Action around the World* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014; Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013).

Then there are anarcho-pacifists or, more generally, those who believe anarchist principles align with pacifist principles. Basically, this line of thought is that physical violence is both morally wrong and the wrong way to bring about anarchism. It follows the principle that the means should embody the ends: if the goal is a peaceful society, then it should be achieved using peaceful methods.[11]

The limitations of armed struggle

In the 1800s in Europe, an armed uprising against the government seemed more possible. Insurgents could throw up barricades in the streets and use rifles to resist government troops. There were no aeroplanes to drop bombs, and no long-range missiles. In terms of weaponry, it was close to an equal contest. Even in the 1930s, in Spain, armed resistance seemed to have a chance of success.

Times have changed, or rather weapons have become more sophisticated, powerful, lethal and able to be targeted. And governments now have all the advantages. Revolutionary urban uprisings have no chance of success in strictly military terms, as long as the police and military remain loyal.

There have also been dramatic changes in training. To deal with the finding that many soldiers on the front lines

11 This approach goes back to Gandhi and before. See for example Geoffrey Ostergaard, "Resisting the nation state. The pacifist and anarchist tradition", 1982, published by the Peace Pledge Union, 1991, and widely available online.

did not fire their rifles, military psychologists got to work designing training methods so that soldiers would not hesitate to fire — or, in hand-to-hand combat, gouge out the eyes of an enemy soldier. With appropriate training, modern soldiers are far more effective in fighting than those in earlier generations.[12]

For those anarchists who imagine an armed uprising, or an armed defence against a determined government, there is a difficult question. What weapons should be used? Would an anarchist fighting force — an army — use automatic weapons or missiles? What about nuclear weapons? And would anarchist fighters be trained to obey orders, and to kill without flinching?

An anarchist fighting force, to be compatible with anarchist principles, would be self-managing, with decisions made collectively. That's quite a contrast with the usual military hierarchy. But how could a self-managing fighting corps decide to use advanced weapons system, unless there was also an associated military complex — also self-managed, presumably — to design and manufacture advanced weapons. If this seems fanciful or grotesque, does it mean that for anarchists to use force to defend the revolution, they must rely on old-fashioned weapons, firing pistols from behind hastily constructed barricades? And do this without any advanced military training? How are amateur fighters going to survive against highly trained opponents with sophisticated weapons?

12 The key reference is Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

In posing these questions, I've entered the realm of fantasy, or maybe satire, because I've never come across any discussions of anarchist planning for armed struggle that get into specifics, much less implementation. The closest things to anarchist fighters in recent decades are the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Kurds in Rojava. Neither group is like a conventional army. The Zapatistas, when they emerged in 1994, presented as a military force, but they soon switched to nonviolent methods.[13] The Kurdish rebels are perhaps closer to an ideal of egalitarian armed resistance. But do they provide a model for anarchist armed rebellion in industrialised societies, ones where the state can deploy a full arsenal against challengers?

The question remains, is armed struggle a viable anarchist strategy?

Given my interest in nonviolence, for years I've been on the lookout for arguments on both ends of the violence-nonviolence spectrum. There is a vast outpouring of material about violence. Think of military history and of novels and films about wars and fighting. In a large bookshop, there may be a large section on the military but seldom more than a few books on nonviolent struggle. In news coverage, wars and violence rate highly. As journalists say, "If it bleeds, it leads." Strikes, boycotts and rallies only occasionally receive the same level of attention. In any

13 Guiomar Rovira Sancho, "From armed struggle to interaction with civil society: Chiapas' Zapatista National Liberation Army," in Véronique Dudouet (ed.), *Civil Resistance and Conflict Transformation: Transitions from Armed to Nonviolent Struggle* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 126–153.

case, in all this coverage, it is rare to see discussions of the rationale for violence. At the international level, it is simply assumed that military forces are needed to defend against enemies, with no consideration of nonviolent defence.

I came across one author presenting the case for violence, William T. Vollmann. He wrote a seven-volume series of books, and also, conveniently, an abridgement.[14] Vollmann argues that violence is inevitable, a part of being human, that nonviolence is pathetic and that violence is morally justified, depending on the circumstances. Most of his writing looks at case studies, assessing justifications for violence.

Vollmann addresses nonviolence entirely by looking at Gandhi, mostly in relation to Hitler, making derogatory comments about him, his ideas and his legacy. Vollmann assumes that Gandhi was successful in India because of British softheartedness. He does not mention other nonviolence literature or other campaigns except the US civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Earlier, I discussed Gene Sharp's "dynamics of nonviolent action," drawn from the elements of typical nonviolent campaigns. Vollmann provides the definitive treatment of violence, but he doesn't seem to have formulated a framework parallel to Sharp's, what might be called the dynamics of violent action. Instead, Vollmann simply assumes that violence is superior, and hence moral.

14 William T. Vollmann, *Rising Up and Rising Down: Some Thoughts on Violence, Freedom and Urgent Means* (New York: Ecco, 2004).

Vollmann's treatment is comprehensive, yet simple in conception. It offers a sort of template for other critiques of nonviolence, of which there are quite a few. One of the most prominent is Peter Gelderloos, an anarchist activist and writer. He is a fierce critic of nonviolence. I carefully read his book *How Nonviolence Protects the State*. Gelderloos claims that nonviolence is ineffective, racist, statist, patriarchal, deluded, and inferior to violence both tactically and strategically.[15] He goes into considerable detail, and on the surface his criticisms seem devastating — at least for readers unfamiliar with studies of nonviolent action. But Gelderloos' argument is based on a questionable assumption: that violence always triumphs over nonviolence. This is not a new assumption, but it has been challenged by a large body of research. Another fundamental shortcoming of Gelderloos' argument is that he never spells out what methods anarchists should be willing to use. Should they use automatic rifles, grenades or rocket launchers? Biological weapons? Should they use torture?

I wrote a long review of Gelderloos' book, and collected responses to other critiques of nonviolence.[16] Nearly always, the critics assume violence will always defeat nonviolent opponents and are coy about what violent methods they support. I've yet to encounter one who

15 Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

16 Brian Martin, "How nonviolence is misrepresented," *Gandhi Marg,* vol. 30, no. 2, July-September 2008, pp. 235–257; "Responses to critiques of nonviolence," https://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/nvcritique.html

supports violence against oppression and says what methods they rule out. My guess is that they would not support waterboarding, land mines or nuclear weapons, but they don't say. There is a challenge for those who endorse violent methods to bring about beneficial social change. What methods can or should be used? How can they succeed against better-armed and better-trained opponents?

Supporters of nonviolent methods also face obstacles. There are tactical and strategic challenges in seeking to confront and defeat repressive states. It's difficult, but it does occur, repeatedly.

In the Philippines in the 1970s, Ferdinand Marcos came to power. He was a dictator. There was opposition, but it was put down. Marcos' biggest rival was Benigno Aquino, who had fled the country. In 1983, Aquino returned to the capital, Manila. He was murdered on arrival at the airport. This showed Marcos' ruthlessness, but it also stimulated unrest.

In 1986, Marcos' credibility was waning, so he called an election. His main opponent was Cory Aquino, the widow of Benigno. Marcos' idea was to gain an endorsement, even if it had to be a fraudulent one. But rigging of the results was so blatant that it triggered an uprising. Hundreds of thousands of people came out on the streets of Manila demanding Marcos' resignation. They were met by troops, but the troops didn't open fire on civilians who posed no threat to them. Then a section of the troops defected to the resistance and the people surrounded the disobedient troops to protect them. After several days of

standoff, Marcos decided to flee the country. The popular uprising had overthrown a dictator.[17]

There's much more to the story, but the central message was clear: a dictator, head of a repressive regime, could be toppled by a popular uprising, without armed resistance. This was a contrast with the usual idea of armed struggle, the model in countries like China, Algeria and Vietnam.

There are many other examples of repressive regimes toppled by popular action, without arms. Guatemala, 1944; El Salvador, 1944; Iran, 1979; Serbia, 2000; Egypt 2011.[18] In some of these, unarmed violence played a role, but nevertheless they offered a different path than armed struggle. Indeed, in the Philippines, there has been an armed resistance for decades, but it has not succeeded. The evidence suggests that unarmed anti-regime campaigns have a better chance of success than armed ones, even against the most repressive regimes.

But from an anarchist point of view, there is a big limitation to these "nonviolent revolutions." They all leave the state intact: they replace one form of top-down rule with another. In most cases, these changes are for the better. But they do not involve people taking over and running things

17 A close-up treatment is Monina Allarey Mercado (ed.), *People Power: An Eyewitness History. The Philippine Revolution of 1986* (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1986).

18 There are many sources. The pathbreaking study of nonviolent challenges to repressive regimes is Erica Chenoweth and Maria J Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

without rulers. They do not lead to a dramatic increase in economic equality.[19]

So, an anarchist might ask, what to do? How can the undoubted power of unarmed citizens to challenge and take down a dictatorial regime be turned to creating a society in which people have a direct say in how their lives are run?

There's another challenge for supporters of nonviolent methods. It's how to promote nonviolent action as a consistent strategy in a world in which violence is the norm, in which most people believe armed forces are necessary to defend against enemies, in which governments and the media constantly raise the alarm about terrorism, in which Hollywood films show good guys winning by using violence, and in which the military-industrial complex has infiltrated every aspect of life. A challenge indeed. The obstacles are enormous, yet there's one positive aspect of this challenge. If violence is so obviously the answer, why does there need to be such indoctrination into its superiority and necessity?[20]

19 Majken Jul Sørensen and I looked at this in "Beyond nonviolent regime change: anarchist insights," *Peace and Change,* vol. 49, no. 2, April 2024, pp. 124–139.

20 For more on anarchism and violence/nonviolence, see Andy Chan, "Violence, nonviolence, and the concept of revolution in anarchist thought," *Anarchist Studies,* vol. 12, no. 2, 2004, pp. 103–123; Benjamin J. Pauli, "Pacifism, nonviolence, and the reinvention of anarchist tactics in the Twentieth Century," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism,* vol. 9, no. 1, 2015, pp. 61–94; Vernon Richards (ed.), *Violence and Anarchism: A Polemic* (London: Freedom Press, 1993).

14
Voting

To vote or not to vote: is that the question? Voting is a defining feature of representative government, namely a government in which rulers are selected by citizens who vote for their preferred candidates.

But what if you're opposed to government, seeking a participatory alternative? Should you vote? This question has vexed anarchists for a long time.

For some perspective, we can go back to articles by Peter Kropotkin titled "Representative government," published in 1892. Given Kropotkin's criticisms, a better title for these articles would have been "Against representative government."[1]

Kropotkin noted the Marxist perspective that the political system always reflects the economic base. What this means is that if the economic system involves capitalists exploiting the working class, then the political system will serve capitalists at the expense of the workers. Following this line of thinking, representative government is not the solution to exploitation but part of the problem.

Governments sometimes defend freedoms, such as freedom of speech and assembly. Kropotkin said such freedoms were forced on governments by popular action. They shouldn't be thought of as gifts.

1 P. Kropotkin, "Representative government," *The Commonweal,* vol. 7, May through July 1892.

Kropotkin next claimed that representative governments seek to meddle in everything. This certainly seems to have continued, with governments regulating births and deaths, housing, foreign travel, traffic, trade, licensing of trades, communications, product safety, and dog-walking, among others. This "meddling" is often for a good purpose, but the problem is that leaders can use state power for their own ends. This is especially notable during wartime, when representative governments transform into "constitutional dictatorships," to use a term from later writers.[2]

Kropotkin was sceptical of parliaments, saying they, "have only served to concentrate power in the hands of the government. Officialism carried to its extreme — that is the chief characteristic of a representative government."[3]

Kropotkin identified a fundamental problem with any centralised government: representatives won't be knowledgeable about most issues they vote on. Imagine being a politician and expected to vote on bills concerning technical health matters, any one of which would warrant detailed study. But there's no time because there are dozens of similarly complex issues, all on top of routine electoral duties. The easiest option is to just go along with the party line, which means just a few politicians determine the outcome.

Kropotkin was scathing about politicians:

2 Clinton L. Rossiter, *Constitutional Dictatorship: Crisis Government in the Modem Democracies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948).

3 Kropotkin, "Representative government," 4 June 1892, p. 1.

> How they fill the hotels, talking affably to the electors and dragging the most silent into discussions in order to entrap them, like members of the swindling fraternity who draw you into betting on the three card trick. How the candidate after having ingratiated himself with them makes his appearance among his "dear electors," the benevolent smile, the modest look, the wheedling voice and all the rest of it, just like an old shrewish furnished-lodging-house keeper in London who tries to entrap a lodger by her sweet smiles and angelic looks. Must we enumerate the lying programmes — always lying — whether they are from the opportunists or revolutionary socialists, …[4]

Kropotkin concluded by commenting that the medieval commune in Europe briefly had true democracy, before royalty used support from nobles and serfs to rise to power, then to rule on behalf of the middle class.

Much of Kropotkin's critique still applies today, but one thing is missing: solutions or alternatives. Kropotkin looked back to the medieval commune, but what about the future? This is a big question,[5] so here let's focus on voting. Kropotkin didn't say anything about it, so it's useful to jump forward in time to a commentary by another famous anarchist, Errico Malatesta.

4 Ibid., p. 2.

5 See the chapter on self-management.

Malatesta on voting

In "Vote — What for?" Malatesta presents a conversation between two socialists, Jack and George.[6] Jack says he never votes, and George remonstrates that it's worth voting for good members of parliament. Jack says, whoever you vote for, whatever they promise in their campaigning, "As soon as they're elected, they forget all about you."

George says, "But you must admit, it's an advantage to have our own men with a voice in affairs." Jack replies,

> It's these rascals who hoodwink the whole of their followers — worse even than the church can do. As soon as socialists, who have perhaps been persecuted like criminals when they were out of office (like Ramsay MacDonald was) get appreciated and estimated [esteemed] by the rich, and shake hands with Royalty, they're won over. When they do run foul of the Government, it's always with kid gloves — they know they're all pals together. They all sit together smugly in the smoking-room the best of friends — you can't imagine them getting too rough even in the debating chamber — and you're a devil of a long way from seeing them having their heads bashed in by the police as they used to get in the old days.

Jack is obviously presenting Malatesta's view. His argument is that anyone elected as a representative of the workers is inevitably corrupted, turning their backs on those who voted for them. Decades later, Ralph Miliband, in a penetrating study, argued that socialist parties, when elected to government, regularly betray their supporters.[7]

Jack says the most important contributors to human misery are private ownership and "Government, which protects the exploiters and takes part in exploitation." As their conversation continues, George eventually turns to another argument: "I agree that revolution is the only salvation, whatever we do, but as it's impossible now, we must make the best of what we can — and that's electioneering. It's propaganda after all."

When this was written, the word "propaganda" didn't have quite the same negative connotations that it later acquired. Just substitute "publicity": George argues that the socialist cause can be advanced via the publicity obtained by running candidates and campaigning for them. As you might expect, Jack is dismissive.

> First of all we have to propagate real socialism, and instead of spinning yarns about trusting politicians, and voting for people, getting people to despise the parliamentary racket, and the whole political machine. Let the rich do the electing by themselves — while the whole public despises them for it. When the workers lose faith in the ballot-box swindle, they'll see the necessity for the social revolution.

Jack by this time has revealed himself as an anarchist. He argues for propaganda not via elections but by going directly to workers in workplaces, building workers' organ-

6 Errico Malatesta, *Vote — What for?* (London: Freedom Press, 1942).

7 Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

isations. The conversation ends with George agreeing with Jack: "They can go to hell with their elections! I want to learn more of anarchism!"

Malatesta, in the person of Jack, presents two arguments against running candidates and voting: those elected will betray their followers, and it's better to organise workers directly rather than get them to vote.

Voting and consent

Back in the 1980s, I came across a book that explained, for me, a lot about voting. It was written by a US political scientist, Benjamin Ginsberg, and titled *The Consequences of Consent.*

Most studies of voting look at the outcomes of elections or at voting behaviour, in other words why voters vote and why they choose particular candidates. Ginsberg looked at something different: the effect of voting on voters. This sounds abstract. He was interested in how voting can affect political activity. And it's not what you might expect. Ginsberg argued that voting serves the government by reducing the risk of mass action, instead working to persuade citizens to obey. In short, voting gives voters the feeling they have consented to the government's authority.

You may have heard about the courageous efforts by campaigners to expand access to the vote, most famously the movement for women's suffrage. Before this, there were campaigns to expand male suffrage, which had initially been limited to the wealthy. Ginsberg says the difficulty of obtaining suffrage has often been overstated. In many cases, governments expanded suffrage even when there was no social pressure to do so. Why? Ginsberg says, "The suffrage

is often conceived by governments to be a means of curbing or preventing political disorder."[8] This makes sense if voting makes voters feel they have consented to being governed. Even for those who don't vote, they know that others have.

For most citizens, voting makes governments seem more legitimate. As Ginsberg writes, "Permitting citizens to participate in elections is perceived by governments to be a source of increased authority and stability."[9]

That's why so many dictatorships run elections, even when they are a sham, with ballots falsified so the ruling party candidates get 99% of the vote. They hope to obtain greater credibility. However, for authoritarian leaders, there's a risk in holding elections, even when the results are fraudulent: the process opens the door to popular challenges. Ginsberg makes this point. This was long before the "electoral revolutions" in Serbia, Ukraine and elsewhere, in which authoritarian leaders held elections and manipulated the counting of the vote, and then were faced by popular uprisings of citizens outraged by the fraud.

Ginsberg says elections have served to help persuade citizens to accept taxation and some losses of individual liberties, building public support for the expansion of the state in relation to other institutions. He points to an irony: elections fuel growth in government which then under-

8 Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Consequences of Consent: Elections, Citizen Control and Popular Acquiescence* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1982), p. 3.

9 Ibid., p. 19.

mines the potential of elections to serve as instruments of popular control.

What encourages people to vote, and to see voting as the key to having an influence? Ginsberg identifies three main factors.

First is the law, for example specifying when elections take place and how to vote. Postal voting, for example, makes it more convenient to vote.

Second is education. In schools, children are taught about voting and elections, and many schools have their own elections for a student council, thus providing a model for adult behaviour. Ginsberg says schools give little attention to other methods of citizen action such as lobbying, lawsuits, organising and direct action. This applies to the US; I'm not sure it's true of other countries.

Third is political parties. In competing with each other, they make great efforts to encourage their supporters to vote. It's unusual for political parties to encourage their members and supporters to do something different, for example encourage people to organise in local neighbourhoods, boycott a government service, protest on a public holiday, or set up alternative decision-making processes.

To these factors encouraging voting, I would add another: media coverage. In both mass and social media, there is continual attention to government leaders, political party machinations, government policy, and elections. At election time, there is intense interest in who will be elected. There is no equivalent attention to decision-making in other domains, such as corporations or government departments.

Elections turn the process of citizen influence into a formal ritual that gives the appearance of significant input

while insulating policymaking from direct citizen intervention. Consider policy on education, taxation, industry or the environment. Citizens do not have a direct say. They can lobby and agitate — and vote. Encouraging people to vote encourages them to think that is how they should interact with policy, even when they are passionate about an issue. Ginsberg notes that elections institutionalise an indirect connection between popular participation and government decision-making, with three elements. First, voters choose leaders, not policies. Second, voters get to do this only occasionally. Third, the voice of voters is reduced in intensity, because the vote of those who don't care about policy is equal to the vote of those who are knowledgeable and passionate.

There is much more to Ginsberg's analysis. Let me finish with a few of his thoughts about elections and political freedom. As noted, he argues that elections put a limit on mass political activity, popular influence and access to power: they transform the potentially disruptive energy of the masses into a source of national power and authority. How does this relate to political freedoms like freedom of speech, assembly and religion? Ginsberg says it's not clear, but that voting and elections are most likely to be promoted when the public has or threatens to have some freedom from state control. He writes, "Essentially, participation is offered to citizens as a substitute for freedom."[10]

When I read Ginsberg's book *The Consequences of Consent* so many years ago, I was greatly impressed, and took pages of notes on it. It's surprising to me that other

10 Ibid., p. 245.

political scientists have not been inspired by Ginsberg's analysis to take it further.[11] Perhaps the explanation for this neglect is that it's not popular to criticise elections, to show that they are not the essence of "democracy" but rather a way of institutionalising and limiting citizen participation, a way of legitimising government, a way of getting citizens to acquiesce to being ruled.

Ginsberg provides an analysis of elections and consent, but does not propose a strategy for change. He suggests that government power has grown, so that citizens have fewer freedoms, and elections have helped in this process. What's the alternative? He doesn't say. And he doesn't address the practical question of whether to vote.

Compulsory voting

In a few countries, voting is compulsory. One of them is Australia. Beginning in the 1920s, each of the six Australian states and the federal government passed laws making voting compulsory. Despite occasional opposition, these laws have remained in place ever since.

In several cases, the original motivation was to obtain electoral advantage. If you think more supporters of your party are non-voters than supporters of other parties, then compulsory voting would bring them to the polls. It seemed a good idea at the time.

11 According to Google Scholar, *The Consequences of Consent* has been cited hundreds of times, but my inspection of some of the citing articles and books suggests there has been little attention to the idea that elections encourage citizens to accept being ruled.

Technically, voting in Australia is not compulsory. What is required of everyone on the electoral roll, for local, state and federal elections, is attending a polling station. It's a secret ballot, so there's nothing to stop you handing in blank or spoiled ballot papers for elections to the senate and house of representatives, and referendums. Some "voters" do indeed fail to indicate a preference, or mess up their ballot paper, often due to confusion. This is called voting "informally," and informal votes constitute a few percent of the total.

The penalty for not voting is a fine, and you can avoid the fine by providing a good excuse, like a medical emergency or being out of the country. Another option is to not give the electoral office your new address after you've moved.

However, for most Australians it's easier to get to a polling station than it is to avoid being fined. And once there, why not indicate your preference? Another inducement, at some stations, is free food, typically sausages at a grill provided by volunteers, a tradition called the democracy sausage.[12]

A few individuals refuse to vote as a matter of principle, and even refuse to pay the fine. This is analogous to conscientious objection to military service (which was ended in Australia in the 1970s), but the stakes are far smaller and the public impact is usually minimal. Perhaps conscientious objection gains little attention because there are easier ways to avoid voting.

12 Judith Brett, *From Secret Ballot to Democracy Sausage: How Australia Got Compulsory Voting* (Sydney: Text Publishing, 2019).

Compulsory voting has had a perverse effect on Australian political parties. Because they don't need to "get out the vote," political parties have decreased in size and activity. There's plenty of activity at the top, as ambitious politicians seek the spoils of office by catering to rich and powerful donors, but party branches have shrunk in size. Furthermore, party leaders no longer need to respond to the party membership. Well, maybe that's not specific to the system of compulsory voting.

If you're opposed to the state and live in a country like Australia, not voting can be a form of civil disobedience. By openly refusing to vote, and telling electoral officers that you have a principled objection to compulsory voting, you resist the state. However, if electoral officials are sensible, they'll persist for a while in trying to impose a fine, but then quietly let it go, because the number of principled objectors is small and they seem to have little influence on the electorate. Principled objectors *care* about voting, but a large number of others just go through the motions, casting their ballots and grabbing a "democracy sausage."

Thought of in big-picture terms, compulsory voting can be thought of as an electoral option that puts a priority on maximising the role of elections in legitimising government, with the compulsory aspects fairly low-key to reduce the likelihood of generating resistance. In this context, principled objection to attending a polling station is swamped by a much larger opposition to compulsion: political figures who think they will come out ahead if voting is voluntary, because they think apathetic citizens are more likely to support their political opponents.

To vote or not to vote, when it's compulsory to attend a polling station: is that the question? Or are other issues more important?

Recap

The question of whether to vote has been a difficult one for anarchists. Kropotkin and many others have argued that representative government is a form of oppression, a denial of people's capacity to collectively organise their own lives. But Kropotkin didn't say anything about whether to vote.

Malatesta argued that socialists should not vote. First, electing socialists is a false hope, because once in power, most of them turn against the interests of their supporters. Second, entering elections to raise awareness about socialism is misguided because it encourages people to believe voting is a path to change, and it's better to raise awareness directly in workplaces.

Nevertheless, radical critics of representative government have had difficulty adhering to a do-not-vote line, because in many cases the choice seems crucial. Stopping a reactionary, dangerous candidate or party seems too important.

George Lakey, a long-time activist, offers an option. He chooses to vote because it's quick and he can talk with people, but he avoids engaging with US election campaigns, which suck energy from social movements.[13]

13 George Lakey, *How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2018), p. 183.

Perhaps a single recommendation, either to vote or not to vote, is too simple. Sometimes it may be better to join an election boycott, to discredit a foregone conclusion; sometimes it may be better to vote to stop a dictator, if there's a chance that election fraud will be exposed and mobilise a popular uprising.

The thing to remember is that voting is a crucial process in getting citizens to consent to being governed. This is the easiest explanation for why dictators hold elections. And if dictators see an advantage in holding elections, that's a warning. Dictators do not introduce forms of citizen participation that threaten their power. This takes us back to Malatesta. Maybe the lesson is to avoid being entranced by elections, and to put energy elsewhere.

Dilemmas

At a personal level, should you vote? Whether or not you do, you can give good reasons for your choice. Or can you? Should you tell your family and friends that you haven't voted? Or that you attended a polling place or sent in a postal ballot but didn't actually name a candidate? Or wrote on your ballot paper, "Whoever you vote for, a politician is elected" or "Don't vote — it only encourages them." Why bother to write anything? Well, it can amuse the scrutineers and make you feel better. If voting is electronic, you can't even do this.

At a group level, should you be involved in campaigning? Should your group seek publicity by campaigning against voting? Should you run a humorous campaign, like my friends who set up the Abolish State Government Party? (It received over 7500 votes without any campaigning.)

Should you set up a stall at a polling place and hand out how-to-vote cards with no candidates ticked, or support for Barbie or the Terminator? Or is it better to avoid the whole election circus and get on with efforts to promote participatory decision-making?

At a strategic level, what's the best way to promote participatory decision-making, to promote alternatives to electoral politics? Is it better to try to discredit voting, elections and parliamentary systems, or to build alternatives? What do you do when most people are entranced by elections? How do you respond when your friends insist that voting is vital to stop a dangerous megalomaniac?

What do you do on election night? Watch the returns like so many other people, host an event on a different topic — or go to bed early? There are so many ways to respond, and it's not obvious what to do.

15
Without government

Before there were governments, how did humans organise their lives? When there was no government, was there a lot more bloodshed? And do the answers to these questions make any difference?

Sometimes it's hard to imagine that human society could be greatly different from what it is today, or different from the periods covered in history books. Yet history only goes back five thousand years or so. Before that, there was no writing and hence no written records. Nevertheless, a lot can be learned about prehistory by studying the remains left by our forebears. Skeletons can reveal how people died, for example by violence.

Steven Pinker, a cognitive psychologist, wrote a book titled *The Better Angels of our Nature,* published in 2011. It is a long book, filled with data. Pinker argues that humans are gradually becoming less violent. He gives figures on the rate of violent death in societies before governments, claiming that they were far bloodier on a per-capita basis than modern societies, even taking into account the World Wars in the 1900s and massive genocides in the past century. That's because the world's population is far greater than it used to be. Pinker says that overall, it is safer to live in today's world than in earlier times. One implication of Pinker's findings is that governments are needed; without them, life would be more deadly due to incessant fighting.

I wasn't convinced by Pinker's arguments, thinking it's too soon to tell when human violence is in decline. A global nuclear war, a continuing possibility, would totally upset Pinker's calculations, though whether the survivors would gloat about how he had been wrong is another matter. But aside from this gloomy thought, I didn't know enough about Pinker's data to make an informed judgement. But it concerned me to think that government was the solution to human violence rather than a prime cause of it.

So how do humans behave when there's no government, no central authority? Can they organise their lives in a humane and productive way? Many people think not, and perhaps this is one of the reasons why anarchy is often seen as chaos and mayhem. Without government, without laws and police to keep people's impulses in check, people imagine there would be looting and shooting. Crazy times indeed.

William Golding was a British novelist. One of his most famous books was *Lord of the Flies,* often taught in schools. It's a fictional story of a group of schoolboys stranded on an island, without teachers or other adults, and how they gradually degenerate. With their base instincts no longer under control, they eventually start murdering their own fellow students. This has become a model, or warning, about what would happen in a world without formal authority, without responsible adults keeping order. Or perhaps *Lord of the Flies* is popular because it confirms people's beliefs about human nature.

The trouble is, the book is fiction. Decades later, Rutger Bregman, a Dutch researcher, wrote a book titled *Humankind,* with a quite different message, that much of

the research showing human depravity when there are no external controls is flawed.[1] Bregman tracked down information about an actual case of boys stranded on an island. They worked together cooperatively for months, until they were rescued. It was just the opposite of the scenario of *Lord of the Flies.*

Another situation where people assume the worst is disasters: the aftermath of earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, fires, when many people are injured and killed, and there is massive destruction. Do people turn to looting and killing? Do they go into panic mode? No, most people hit by disasters behave rationally, and try to help each other.

There were studies about this back in the 1950s. These were the early years of the Cold War, when fears about nuclear war were at their height. US planners wanted to know how people would respond to a nuclear attack, so they studied behaviour during disasters such as tornadoes. They found little evidence of panic or antisocial activity. Just the opposite. Most people do what they can to help each other, something that has been shown repeatedly since then.[2] This mutual aid occurs when people are on their own, without governments stepping in to impose order.

1 Rutger Bregman, *Humankind: A Hopeful History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

2 For example, Fred Charles Iklé, *The Social Impact of Bomb Destruction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958); Jack Hirschleifer, "Some thoughts on the social structure after a bombing disaster," *World Politics,* vol. 8, January 1956, pp. 206–227. See also Amanda Ripley, *The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes — and Why* (New York: Crown, 2008).

Given the evidence, it seems strange that people continue to believe that government is needed to prevent chaos and violence. It seems that governments have done a superb job in convincing people of their necessity.

Stateless societies

In the early 1980s, I came across a book by Harold Barclay titled *People Without Government.* Barclay was an anthropologist who worked at the University of Alberta, Canada. His book is a survey of stateless societies and their characteristics, discussing their relevance to anarchism.

Barclay said anarchy is a society with no ruler and no government, and that anarchism is a social political theory in which anarchy is the result of a self-conscious theory of values with human freedom and individuality paramount. It opposes the state, church and the patriarchal family, among other forms of rule, and involves voluntary cooperation, and federalism to deal with large-scale social relations. Barclay's description is a pretty standard view of anarchy and anarchism.

Barclay surveyed a wide range of stateless societies, starting with hunter-gatherers such as Eskimos and Pygmies, then gardeners, herders, agriculturalists and finally the "modern world" including intentional communities and the anarchists in the Spanish Revolution. He did not claim any of these societies were ideal, for example noting that sex and age inequality were common in most of them.

I was especially interested in what Barclay had to say about war. He said that anarchic societies engage in hostilities that are better called feuding, rather than war. Feuds, he said, didn't lead to many lives lost because the aim was

maintaining group harmony, not annihilation. The fear of feuding was the key mechanism rather than feuding itself. As for war, "true warfare entails the organisation of armies with a chain of command and with the intent of subjugating an enemy and occupying his territory."[3]

Barclay had much more to say about anarchism. For example, he said societies without government often have numerous oppressive features which would seem to inhibit free creative expression. The implication is that freedom from government by itself is not enough to stimulate a flowering of culture. This would require a specialisation of tasks to allow the emergence of a community of scholars or artists.

In the final chapter, "Do anarchic politics have a message?", Barclay said that order in anarchic polities is founded on diffuse sanctions. These include self-help, self-regulation and self-restraint, channelled by fear and by a motivation to make the system work and cause minimum friction. This is a useful corrective to the frequently heard view that anarchy means people can do anything they want. The experience of anarchic societies shows that constraints are needed whenever people live together. The question is, what are the constraints? And how are they decided and implemented?

Barclay was open about his commitment to anarchism. Unlike most anthropologists, he didn't assume that government was a requirement for civilisation, for everything prized in an "advanced" culture. He was willing to learn

3 Harold Barclay, *People Without Government* (London: Kahn & Averill with Cienfuegos Press, 1982), p. 125.

from societies that used to be called "primitive." Did this mean that his views in *People without Government* were tainted? Or did it mean that he was one of the few not assuming that governments were a sign of human progress?

It was difficult for me to answer such questions. It seemed too hard to delve into anthropology to seek answers. Perhaps it was enough that Barclay offered a different view. He showed that humans have the capacity to organise their lives without government, and indeed had done so for most of the time they have been the species *homo sapiens*.

It doesn't take long to discover that governments are pretty new, and they only emerged with agriculture, perhaps five thousand years ago. I came across some authors who suggested that this was the beginning of big problems.[4] Think of systems of oppression: slavery, exploitation of workers, armies, torture, massive killing. There didn't seem to be much of this in hunter-gatherer societies. They might have been patriarchal and ageist, but they didn't have the resources to set up armies or command workers to build monuments to rulers, like the pyramids in Egypt.

But what was life like before the rise of governments? Was it a terrible struggle for survival, with horrible living conditions and few pleasures? That seemed to be a common assumption, namely that without government, without a system to control people's impulses, everything will go to hell.

This is where anthropologists can provide insight. Marshall Sahlins wrote a book titled *Stone Age Economics,*

4 Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987).

published in 1972. He studied the economies of hunter-gatherer societies, looking for insights into the problems and possibilities for economic organisation. At the very beginning of his book, he presents two roads to affluence. In the first, as described by the famous economist John Kenneth Galbraith, human wants are great and industrial production provides "urgent goods." In the second, a Zen approach, human wants are finite and few, and the means to provide them are unchanging but adequate.

The usual assumption is that people in hunter-gatherer societies had to work really hard just to stay alive. Not according to Sahlins. He suggested that four hours of work daily was enough. They had lots of leisure time. He wrote,

> The world's most primitive people have few possessions, *but they are not poor.* Poverty is not a certain amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization.[5]

So maybe things weren't so bad before agriculture, before governments. Maybe agriculture was the beginning of big problems, of exploitation — and poverty.

Enter Goliath

It was with this background that a friend recommended that I should read Luke Kemp's new book *Goliath's Curse.* She thought I would be interested, and I was.

5 Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine Atherton, 1972), p. 37.

Goliath's Curse is an analysis of the rise and fall of Goliaths. Goliath is the name Kemp uses for any system of power based on extracting resources from a population within an area. Here's his definition: "A state is a set of centralized institutions that imposes rules on and extracts resources from a population in a territory, whether that be ancient Egypt or the US today."[6] A state is a Goliath, and so is an empire like the Roman Empire, or the Aztecs in Central America, the Incas in South America, and a succession of empires in China. Kemp examines these and many others that I, and most people, had never heard of.

According to Kemp, Goliaths only emerged about 11,000 years ago, with the rise of agriculture. Before this, for most of human evolution, people lived as hunter-gatherers, and there was no massive exploitation or killing. Kemp: "For the vast majority of human history there were no chiefs, commanders, or aristocrats. … Our Palaeolithic ancestors were egalitarian."[7]

Goliath's Curse is massively referenced, bringing everything that Barclay had covered up to date. So thorough and convincing is Kemp's analysis that I initially imagined that he was an anthropologist. He isn't, but he has drawn on anthropological research so convincingly, and checked his analysis with experts in the field, that he seems like one. His conclusion about societies without government — namely, Goliaths — is powerful: humans, through aeons before the advent of agriculture, lived cooperatively. This

6 Luke Kemp, *Goliath's Curse: The History and Future of Societal Collapse* (London: Penguin, 2025), p. 42.

7 Ibid., p. 36.

has always been the vision of anarchists, that it's possible, indeed much better, to organise life without government. Kemp has provided a powerful case for anarchism, without mentioning the word.

This is only the prelude in Kemp's analysis. His special interest is in what makes Goliaths possible, and what causes them to collapse, as they always do. By studying a great number of Goliaths, Kemp identifies three things that make them possible. Kemp calls them Goliath fuel.

The first is "lootable resources": things that can be captured and controlled. The earliest such resource was grain. More recently, oil and coal fit the bill. When societies create lootable resources, this provides an opportunity for a small number of power-seekers to use them to build the capacity to oppress others. This was not possible in hunter-gatherer societies.

The second Goliath fuel is monopolisable weapons: weapons that can be controlled by a few to control others. The earliest such weapons were hand-held bronze swords and axes. Later, colonial empires were built on gunpowder used in muskets and cannons. Today, it's nuclear weapons. Today's nuclear weapons states are obsessive about stopping terrorists and competitor states from breaking their monopoly, and of course they don't want to disarm.

Kemp calls the third Goliath fuel "caged land." This means anything that prevents people from leaving. Many early Goliaths collapsed when residents fled to nearby areas where they could live on the land without being dominated. Today, control over movements is through borders, passports and surveillance.

Since the advent of agriculture, Goliaths have drawn on these three fuels to build their power and oppress populations under their control. But, Kemp shows, Goliaths always collapse, eventually. And he gives the main reasons, which include escalating economic inequality, competition between elites, and environmental shocks such as protracted droughts.

Today we live in a Global Goliath, a worldwide system of extracting resources for the benefit of the wealthy and powerful, a system that is on the path to collapse due to inequality and the risks of nuclear war and global heating.

The implications for anarchists are many. It is possible for humans to live together without rulers; they did this for hundreds of thousands of years, before agriculture. The psychological traits among humans were suited for egalitarianism among hunter-gatherers, but with the rise of lootable resources, monopolisable weapons and caged land, humans with power-seeking personalities could gain power over the rest of the population. In other words, human nature was much the same, but in new circumstances enabled the rise of systems of rule. So the task of anarchists is to change the circumstances so that systems of rule are no longer feasible. Following Kemp, ways to do this include promoting non-lootable resources (like local renewable energy), non-monopolisable methods of struggle (like boycotts and strikes) and methods of avoiding government controls over movement. Not easy!

Conclusion

I'm not an expert on hunter-gatherer societies, on the rise of agriculture and empires, or other aspects of human

history and prehistory. It's interesting to read about these things, but hard to know how much significance to put on the findings reported by those who study them in depth.

One option is to try to become an expert yourself, or to immerse yourself in the studies in the area. That's a big commitment. But there's an ongoing risk, or temptation, in any of this: believing what's appealing. With an interest in and sympathy for anarchism, it's tempting to latch onto work by Harold Barclay, David Graeber or Luke Kemp, because their conclusions mesh with my sympathies.

Another approach is to become a sceptic, to look for evidence contrary to what's appealing. A good start is Steven Pinker's treatment of human nature. But with any scepticism, there's a choice to be made, namely what to be sceptical about. Is it better to be sceptical of Pinker or Barclay — or both? It's risky to rely on a single authority.

A possible resolution is to be clear about your values, look for studies that align with them and learn from them, but also check out contrary studies and learn from them too. This requires considerable effort. In many areas, the arguments go very deep, so deep that there's no way to get to the bottom of them.

Another approach is to look for ideas that might help guide action today. Studies of history and prehistory show what humans have done and hence what they are capable of. It's easy to see that humans are capable of cooperation and kindness, but also capable of incredible cruelty and violence. The challenge is to find out how best to evoke and build on the positives and to deter the negatives.

16
Why work?

In 1983, the anarchist publisher Freedom Press released an edited book titled *Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society.* The editor was Vernon Richards, a veteran anarchist and key figure in Freedom Press.

I knew Vernon. Three of my books were published by Freedom Press, and Vernon and I had an extended correspondence about them and other matters. We met just once, when I visited London for the first time, in 1990, and stopped by the Freedom Press bookshop and offices.

Vernon told me that he would have liked to publish my first book, *The Bias of Science,* but couldn't due to lack of money at the time, in the late 1970s. Freedom Press was just one of 30 publishers that declined to publish that book.[1] I've sometimes wondered whether things would have been much different had Freedom Press published it, giving it more international attention and credibility.

In our letters years later, Vernon told me never to get old, as it was horrible. I didn't realise at the time that he was probably depressed and needed help. It's hard to know what to do or say when you only know someone through letters and are not in touch with others in their life. Vernon was born in 1915 and died in 2001.

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1 *The Bias of Science* (Canberra: Society for Social Responsibility in Science (ACT), 1979).

Back to *Why Work?* Anarchists have long been concerned about work, with their preoccupation being decision-making on the job. They oppose bosses, arguing that workers should be running things. One branch of anarchist theory and action, called syndicalism, sees workplaces as central to the creation of a free society.

Why Work? was about something different. It was about who has to work and what people do when they're not working. Most of the readings in this edited collection are short. Many of the issues raised about the organisation of work are still relevant today. Though the contributors take different perspectives, there are some common themes. One is that much work is pointless, only necessary as part of an economic system that links work with money, survival and exploitation. Technology makes it possible to reduce working hours. A second common theme is that cooperative systems provide the basis for a system of meaningful work.

The lead chapter, "In praise of idleness," is by the famous philosopher Bertrand Russell. It was first published in 1932. Although Russell was not an anarchist, many of his views resonated with anarchist sentiments.

Russell's chief target was the widespread belief that work is a good thing, a virtue. He said this idea was promoted by a group of those who didn't work: the rich, especially those with inherited wealth. If people believe there is something wrong with not working — especially when it's poor people not working — then the system of inequality can be maintained.

Russell argued that the economy had plenty of capacity to produce enough for everyone to live, with work reduced to four hours per day. This would give people much more time for leisure. Although most of this leisure time would probably be wasted in trivial pursuits, Russell guessed that one out of a hundred would use their time for the greater good, in "cultured" activities. He made this estimate based on the lives of the landed gentry, who did not need to work. Nevertheless, a small percentage of them, for example biologist Charles Darwin, used their "leisure" for serious pursuits.

Camillo Berneri's chapter is titled "The problem of work." Berneri noted the evils of factory work, where the worker is controlled. In contrast, work is attractive when one is interested in the activity.

If people were not forced to work to make a living, then employers fear (or claim) that they would be lazy, and some jobs would not be done. The solution to this problem is to make work attractive. Berneri called for a rational distribution of jobs, a rational alternation of effort and rest, and the "rational employment of the particular worker's instincts, feelings and mental aptitude."[2]

The famous anarchist Peter Kropotkin is included, with a chapter titled "The wage system." Kropotkin notes that collectivists, both bourgeois and socialist, expect skilled workers to be paid more than less skilled ones. However, some high payments are due to professional monopolies while others are due to profit. All work involves dependence on the work of others, past and present, and production outputs are in part due to tech-

2 Camillo Berneri, "The problem of work," in Vernon Richards (ed.), *Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society* (London: Freedom Press, 1983), pp. 59–82, at p. 81.

nology and past labour. Kropotkin argues against what we would today call meritocracy — giving rewards according to merit — and argues that a better principle is "To each according to needs."

There is a chapter by Tony Gibson. I recognised his name. He regularly wrote for *Freedom,* the fortnightly magazine published by Freedom Press. His chapter has an intriguing title, "Who will do the dirty work?" Gibson wrote that this is a standard question asked of anarchists. "Dirty" occupations, he said, include nursing, cleaning sewers, soldiering and — perhaps strangely — being a politician. "Dirty" here refers to social prestige, and certainly some occupations have consistently low prestige. Collecting garbage is one of them.

Gibson addressed a challenge: if in a free society there would be no social coercion to work, who would clean sewers or empty bedpans? Gibson said the amount or type of work is not the key, but rather making it intrinsically satisfying. Remembering that the vast majority of so-called workers do nothing useful, then without coercion, people will produce for need. The industrial system, said Gibson, needs to be reorganised with workers in control.

Gaston Leval is represented by a brief chapter on "Collectives in the Spanish Revolution." For anarchists, this revolution, 1936–1939, is almost holy, showing how work could be reorganised with workers in control. Leval said the experience with worker collectives during the revolution showed they were superior to competition. In collectives, individuals are stimulated to serve others, and discoveries are immediately applied for the common good. That made me think of patents, a form of intellectual property, which are monopolies over discoveries. The Spanish revolution showed another approach is possible.

The final and longest contribution to *Why Work?* is by Vernon Richards himself. It consists of 15 editorials that he wrote for *Freedom* between 1958 and 1962. These are readable little essays, raising basic points about useless work, the inequities of distribution, and the need for an economic system not driven by profit. Many of the essays point to the foolishness of official concerns about unemployment and the lack of economic growth.

Vernon said unemployment is artificially created. Once production is geared to the needs of the community, then unemployment — the lack of paid work to satisfy needs — becomes nonexistent. Another point he made was that, worldwide, natural resources and people are unequally distributed. The aim should be to promote the satisfaction of needs worldwide, not country by country. Yet another point I noted was that the way income is allocated should be different from the way work is distributed. This is radical indeed, an alternative to the usual assumption that income is merited based on one's contribution to the economy.

What's changed?

Why Work? presents a variety of voices and perspectives, but several common themes remain relevant decades later. One is that much work is pointless. There seems to be little reason to do useless work except to earn money. In other words, the economy in much of the world is irrational, with many people doing unnecessary tasks just to make a living while others, the unemployed, are denied the opportunity to do useless work.

This idea has seldom featured in the usual commentaries about "the economy." However, it received quite a bit of attention as a result of an article and book by anarchist David Graeber. His book was provocatively titled *Bullshit Jobs.* Using the term "bullshit" garnered more interest than the more temperate language of previous writers on the topic. Graeber's idea was not new but he was better at introducing it into public discussions.[3]

A second theme in *Why Work?* is that work should be satisfying and meaningful. This indeed would be a dramatic change for most workers. Tie this to work not being compulsory, and a completely different picture emerges. No one would bother with useless work, with bullshit jobs, and these jobs would drop by the wayside. Tony Gibson asked, "Who will do the dirty work?" His answer was that people will do it if it's meaningful.

Business and self-help authors wax lyrical about the wonders of employee engagement, change leadership, and building more productive workplaces. But it's rare to find any discussion of getting rid of managers, with instead workers collectively making decisions about how to do the work, even what to produce. The anarchist alternative is that worker collectives are in control, as described in Leval's chapter and many other sources. Nothing much has changed. This alternative is still off the agenda, indeed feared by most owners and top executives.

A fourth theme in *Why Work?* relates to work and income. Richards argued that the distribution of work should be separated from the distribution of income.

3 David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (Penguin, 2018).

Kropotkin and others argued that income should be allocated according to need: those who have the greatest needs should receive the most support, and everyone should have enough for a comfortable life.

This sounds unrealistic, but it's possible to see elements of it today. Many people voluntarily accept a lower salary for work that involves helping others. So it's plausible that many more would be happy with a lower income if they could be involved in decision-making in the workplace, steering it to serve people's needs.

Finally, there's the international dimension. Richards said the aim should be satisfaction of needs internationally, or rather globally. This remains utopian. Nearly every government in the world puts its priority on raising the income and improving the welfare of its own citizens. Yes, some provide foreign aid, and some of this foreign aid is beneficial, even as exploitative economic arrangements cause poverty in poor countries. Imagine a national leader in a rich country who says, "We'll set our trade policies to try to raise living standards in our less affluent trading partners." Instead, trade is assumed to be mutually beneficial, while global economic inequality has hardly changed in decades.

All in all, the ideas in *Why Work?* remain just as relevant today as they were decades ago. These ideas can continue to offer a vision, something to strive towards. And efforts towards this vision can be, should be, a cooperative project.

What to do?

Back to the present. What's worth doing in relation to work? One option is organising on the job. That's a long-standing approach by anarchists, especially by syndicalists. But what if most of the work being done is useless? Should syndicalists be trying to organise workers when the work isn't useful? There's a straightforward answer: take over the workplace and reorient production to human needs. Easier said than done![4]

What about defending against job cuts? If AI threatens to wipe out large numbers of jobs, especially routine, unsatisfying jobs, should that be opposed as a threat to livelihoods or welcomed as a step towards a leisure society?

Perhaps the priority should be pushing for shorter working hours and a universal basic income (UBI). That would give workers greater freedom from exploitation on the job, because it would be easier to leave. But most thinking about a UBI assumes it will be run by the government. Should anarchists support a government-run UBI or try to build their own mutual-support version? Not easy!

Then there's the international dimension. Is it better to support so-called "free trade" knowing that it involves the exploitation of workers in poor countries? Maybe the aim should be to support workers' initiatives internationally. But how?

4 See the chapter on the Lucas inspiration.

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Conclusion

For many people who are appalled by the violence, inequality, exploitation and cruelty in today's world, anarchism is an attractive political perspective. By comparison with current systems, the anarchist alternative may seem pure and unsullied, but that's in theory. In practice, there are bound to be problems. My view is that it's better to address these openly rather than pretend they don't exist.

Besides the topics addressed in the previous chapters, there are many other areas for anarchists to probe assumptions, alternatives and methods, for example anti-social behaviour, child rearing, the environment, feminism, immigration, population and racism. The challenge is to look closely at weaknesses in anarchist theory and practice, as a basis for finding answers, solutions and alternatives.

All political philosophies and religions have their own dilemmas and challenges. Sometimes these are recognised and dealt with, but often they are submerged because they are embarrassing or threatening. The question in each case arises: is it better for supporters to recognise and deal with weaknesses, or instead to leave it to outsiders and opponents? I assume that it's better when sympathisers tackle anarchism's shortcomings and unanswered questions.

How? Anarchism has its own special approach, combining theory and practice, rather than relying on belief

systems or authorities. An anarchist approach to its own dilemmas involves rationality, participation and collective decision-making. This sounds nice, but it no doubt has its own challenges. At least there's a saving grace. If there were no challenges, no debates, no difficulties, that would be a sign of dogma and stagnation. An ongoing effort to address anarchist dilemmas is a welcome sign.

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