

Talking with the left

by Jens Störfried

What the fuck is leftism? Honestly, I didn't understand it until now. It's true, the term comes from parliamentarianism, the arrangement of seats where radical Republicans or Democrats (all male) sat on the left. This tradition was continued. The term "left" is by no means to be reduced to this. But because the party stuff is attached to it, because of its sponginess and because of its uniformity, it is not really useful, in my opinion, to refer to it. This is also the case with extra-parliamentary politics. It's vague and it's assigned to party politics, which in turn is assigned to the state in a party democracy. Sure, things can be achieved with it. But at the level of political action. Self-organization from below and the autonomy of various groups look different. But this does not obviate that anarchists want to found autonomous organizations, get involved in them, broaden them and radicalize them. The fact that this seems to be strange in Germany and that anarchists often see themselves as leftists is problematic. Nevertheless, they can participate in social mass movements. Why it is worthwhile for anarchists to determine themselves and to develop self-confidence and self-awareness:

1) Politics is not fun and structurally sucks. If anarchists have to deal with it, it is out of necessity. Since emancipation processes on a purely individual way are impossible and not a hobby, but with it we are striving for the overcoming of domination and a new society, it is necessary to do politics from time to time. The ambivalence inherent in politics is one that arises from the social relations of domination in which it takes place. Since anarchists act in these contradictions in order to dismantle them, they consequently engage in a kind of (anti)politics. With this they can organize themselves in such a way that it is about the wholeness of their life, thus they dismantle alienation instead of accepting it.

2) Anarchists are mostly skeptical of organizations. They have good reasons for this: Hierarchies arise in organizations, they can become an end in themselves or claim to represent certain projects or people. Pressed into the framework of a structure that is legalized bureaucratically (i.e. as an association, party, trade union, etc.), the logics of social hierarchy and its administration are accepted and adapted in and through organizations. Many people cannot even imagine what it means to organize autonomously, decentrally, voluntarily and horizontally. But this is possible and also necessary to implement anarchist ideas. It is problematic when such a network - let's call it federation - revolves around itself. Organizations should serve certain purposes, which should go beyond not feeling isolated, powerless and incapable of action or fulfilling leadership desires and needs for order.

3) With anarchist (anti-)politics quantitative logics are rejected and democracy as a form of domination is rejected. Instead of uniting many people as will-less sheep under a meaningless label, anarchists are concerned with promoting the self-organization of thousands of different groups and networking them. This also affects organizing practices. While these can be institutionalized, decision-making oriented,

and designed for continuity, they must not become encrusted. Organizations and institutions, are not alienating in themselves, but the shape and processes they take in a society of domination. It cannot be a matter of pretending that we have the truth. Rather, others can be convinced of our ideas if we implement them ourselves in concrete projects. There are as many approaches, methods and projects as there are different topics, milieus and contexts. Instead of winning supporters of our concepts, we should encourage them to find their own ways, to articulate and organize themselves. This does not mean that all approaches and ways are equally good and meaningful and that we should not criticize and judge them. It is precisely when we rebel together that we can find each other, develop affinities with each other and become radically more.

4) Undoubtedly an absurdity is the policy of demands, which is widespread in more or less radical left groups. Even anarchists still demand and do it even worse than everyone else. Because often it is neither clear what the demand means concretely, which subject expresses it, which power base exists for its enforcement, nor to which addressees it is directed and what they are supposed to do. This does not have to be. Not for nothing did anarchists develop direct actions. These mean not only sabotage and attacks, but all forms of self-determined actions in which anarchist ideas are expressed and directly implemented. Instead of reforming improvements, a qualitative change of the situation can thus be produced. The assumption that there is a totality which can be destroyed is essentially a rudiment from Marxist theory. Rather, desirable social conditions exist parallel to those of domination. We can and should start from these.

5) It is obvious, we see it on every corner: The course that history has taken must be stopped. We need a break and a new beginning. History is not a one-dimensional process of progress, but an intricate path, which is not determined by supposed laws, but by the conflicts of different actors. This also means criticizing the idea of civilization, recognizing that technology does not simply make us freer but usually imposes new constraints, as well as questioning how much resources people should exploit for their happiness. Overcoming industrial society can only succeed if we transform the existing structures and manage them ourselves. Of course, this means giving up securities that the existing order of domination guarantees to its relatively privileged members. This is a major reason why so many people are afraid of radical change. But what are these securities on which the existing system is based, and does it thus really enable a desirable life for many? We can only find and build new securities together if we leave the old ones behind.

6) People are in very various situations and in different ways affected by exploitation, oppression and alienation. These differences must be noted and acknowledged. Only the subjugated themselves can emancipate from domination, and to do so, very different struggles must be waged. Moreover, we are all entangled in relations of domination from which we must work our way out. Therefore, the orientation towards identities is obvious, but not sufficient for people to empower themselves. As individuals, they do not merge into their social roles and groups. Emancipation always means de-identifying from these.

7) How the demands of individuals and the dynamics in groups can be brought together and individualism and collectivism can be mediated is a constant theme in anarchism. The existing form of society does not allow for self-determination and self-development of the individual, nor does it allow for voluntary, solidarity-based communality as envisioned by anarchists. This fact is reflected in the existing subjects (their ways of thinking and behaving, their perceptions and forms of relationships), as well as in the existing, mostly hierarchical institutions. It is terrible when people cannot shape their own lives, but are compulsively bound to collectives in which they are prescribed and expected to do. Equally problematic is the egoism and narcissism that bourgeois individualism produces, which prevents people from forming trusting and binding bonds with one another. Social revolution is a collective process in which individuals struggle for, experience, and appropriate social freedom. This succeeds only if they relate to each other in a critical solidarity.

8) In this process, there are no absolute truths and we can only understand the world piecemeal from a particular perspective. This is why it is so important to put individual pieces together and change perspectives to get a better sense of the whole. Theories can be helpful tools for describing reality and expanding our awareness. But the world is always more complex than we can recognize. If we want to re-appropriate it, this means that we do not sacrifice ourselves for the struggle, but rather satisfy our needs together in it, even if this is undoubtedly difficult and only works in a distorted way under the existing order of domination. None of us is out of the ideologies of domination, but we can question them, criticize each other and develop further, instead of falling into cynicism, fatalism and nihilism.

These various points obviously do not represent a real break with the left. They do, however, illustrate the difference that anarchist perspectives open up. Anarchy is not realized by leftist movements, but by many people and groups beginning to take their lives into their own hands, becoming solidary in the process, and fighting for the conditions so that a good, rich, and fulfilling life can become possible for all. For life as a whole to change, we need shared visions and social-revolutionary forms of organization in which people voluntarily associate, empower themselves, and help each other. The desire for anarchy transcends political programs and strategies by far. It does not merge into the logics and practices of the political left. But it invites us to seduce leftists, to dissuade them from their enclosed, fixed, supposedly clear paths and ideas of order, to dare to leap into the unknown, and thus to allow for entirely new experiences. This becomes possible and exciting only when anarchists take themselves seriously and understand and form themselves as a self-confident, independent project.

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