

An Anarchist FAQ after 21 years

For reasons too unimportant to discuss here, the 20th anniversary blog for *An Anarchist FAQ* (AFAQ) ended up on my personal blog rather than AFAQ's "official" one. Now I correct this by reposting it here as well as taking the opportunity to preface it with a few comments to mark 21 years since AFAQ was officially launched.

This year, 2017, marks numerous anarchist related anniversaries besides AFAQ's – most obviously, 100 years since the Russian Revolution (see [section A.5.4](#)). Given subsequent events, it is easy to forget that the overthrow of the Tsar was initially – and rightly – viewed as great event by all on the left. As information of the increasing *social* nature of the revolt – what Voline termed *The Unknown Revolution* – became better known, the far-left was increasingly enthused by the revolution: workers had formed soviets and were starting to organise unions and factory committees, peasants were taking back the land, and so on. The revolution – as Anarchists alone had argued during the failed revolution of 1905 – was going beyond political reform into a social revolution. Reports of the new, radical and functionally based democracy were avidly read across the Left and especially by Anarchists – it appeared that our vision of social revolution was coming true.

By the early 1920s, Anarchists had broken with the new regime. Accounts of the dictatorial nature of the Bolsheviks could no longer be ignored – particularly when coming from eye-witnesses like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman as well as the reports of the delegates from syndicalist unions sent to the Second Congress of the *Communist International* and that of the newly formed *Red International of Labour Unions*. However, what Berkman termed *The Bolshevik Myth* held sway in the non-Anarchist left in spite of these facts becoming available. While this myth was slowly eroded as the evils of the regime became harder and harder to ignore, the damage had been done: the liberatory promise of revolution and of socialism became associated with its opposite.

Anarchists were not surprised that State socialism became a new class system – we had, after all, predicted this from Proudhon and Bakunin onwards. However, this did not stop many on the left believing *The Bolshevik Myth* and today there are still many grouplets on the left (with impressive names which reflect aspirations rather than reality) which denounce Stalinism while seeking the "genuine" socialism of the Bolsheviks. As part of its goal to be a resource for Anarchists, AFAQ sought to show the links between the regime of Lenin and Trotsky and that of Stalin. It sought to show the ideological roots of the degeneration of the Revolution and to show that the post-hoc explanations first postulated by Trotsky and regurgitated by Leninists to this day were inadequate.

This was part of the aim of [section H](#) (on Marxism) and I think it was successful. Originally, it was going to be much bigger, too big as it turned out. So sections on the Russian Revolution which were originally planned to be in section H (including ones on Kronstadt and the Makhnovists) were moved to [an appendix](#). This appendix, as noted in the 20th anniversary blog, is still incomplete but its most important points have been placed in [section H](#), particularly in [section H.6](#) which summarises *why* the Russian Revolution failed and, just as importantly, that anarchist warnings were proven correct. It shows how that favourite post-hoc excuse of Marxists – "objective circumstances" – does not explain what happened and how ideological and structural factors are much more significant.

Ideological, for the politics of the Bolsheviks played a key role. For example: their vision of socialism was impoverished, their analysis of the State was flawed and their vanguardist perspective inherently hierarchical (see [section H.5](#)). Some of these ideological positions were unique to the Bolsheviks, many were simply Marxism (or at least social-democratic) as we show (not least, the prejudices in favour of centralisation and economic central-planning).

Structural, for the prejudices of Bolshevik ideology played their part in the organisations and solutions they favoured. A perspective which assumes centralisation is “proletarian” and inherently “efficient” builds certain types of organisation. These structures, in turn, produce certain forms of social relationships – namely, a division between rulers and ruled. Centralised bodies also produce a bureaucracy around them in order to make decisions and implement them.

So the interaction of ideology and structure played its part and the “objective circumstances” pushed the embryonic bureaucratic class system in certain ways but they did not create it. In other words, while some kind of new class system was inevitable, the horrors of Stalinism can be said to be the product of the specific factors facing the Russian Revolution. A shorter civil war, for example, may have resulted in a less brutal regime in the 1930s. Note, *less* brutal – for Lenin’s regime *was* a bureaucratic State-capitalist party dictatorship and had been within six months of the October Revolution.

Hopefully, AFAQ has shown that the real turning point of the revolution was not Kronstadt in 1921 but the spring of 1918 when the Bolsheviks made explicit what had always been implicit: that party power was more important than soviet democracy. It also shows that recent research confirms that Berkman and Goldman were right (see my [“From Russia with Critique.”](#) *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, No. 69) and are far better guides to understanding what went wrong than turn-coats like Serge (see my [“Victor Serge: The Worst of the Anarchists.”](#) *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, No. 61).

We need to learn the lessons of history rather than seek post-hoc rationalisations which will inevitably lead to a similar outcome in the unlikely event of a Bolshevik-style party gaining popular support as in 1917. I must stress unlikely, for as well as Leninists having little grasp on the actual course of the revolution after October, as discussed in [section H.5.12](#) they also fail to understand that the Bolshevik party in 1917 did not act like modern-day vanguardists think it did. For if it had, as in 1905, then it would have been as counter-productive – when not irrelevant – as modern-day Leninist sects are. This does not mean there was no party bureaucracy – there was, with an obvious negative impact before *and* after it seized power – but that it was usually ignored by the rank-and-file while being fought by Lenin: it was revolutionary during 1917 in spite of itself, its structures and its perspectives.

Anarchists, of course, did not need to come up with post-hoc explanations for the failure of the Revolution. Our predictions and warnings were confirmed – the State is not simply an instrument of economic class but has its own interests, nationalisation does not end capitalism but just replaces the boss by the bureaucrat, the State is centralised to ensure minority rule and cannot be used to abolish it, and so on. If Marxism paid anything other than lip-service to the idea of “scientific socialism” then all socialists would be anarchists.

Talking of Marxism, the first volume of *Capital* was published 150 years ago, in 1867, twenty years after Marx’s disgraceful diatribe against Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Looking at both works is interesting, not least because Marx singularly failed in 1867 to

apply the methodology he denounced Proudhon for not following in 1847. Instead, he uses the very one he mocked the Frenchman for utilising – namely building an abstract model of capitalism – while also taking up Proudhon’s theory of exploitation he had likewise once ridiculed (see my [“The Poverty of \(Marx’s\) Philosophy”](#), *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, No. 70). Ironically, if you ignore the facts and accept *The Poverty of Philosophy* as a valid critique of Proudhon then you also have to admit it is also a valid critique of *Capital*, which is *not* the book he criticised Proudhon for not writing in 1847.

In many ways, *The Poverty of Philosophy* is the template of subsequent Marxist polemics on Anarchism (see [section H.2](#) for a critique of the most common claims). It is full of so many distortions that it is nearly impossible to answer them all, not to mention the postulating of some notion – in this case, amongst many others, labour notes and idealism – that are just inventions. Take the latter. As one ex-Marxist academic noted:

“Despite Marx’s scornful criticism, it is not the case that Proudhon regarded actual social conditions and economic forces as the embodiment of abstract philosophical categories antecedent to social reality. On the contrary, he is at pains to state that the intellectual organisation of social reality in abstract categories is secondary to that reality.” (Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978], vol. 1, p. 205)

Which raises the obvious question: why did Marx suggest Proudhon was an idealist given that he obviously was not? Then again, this is hardly an isolated case and most Marxists have tended to follow this example when trying to critique anarchism. As informed readers of Marxist polemics against Anarchism will know, the notion of post-truth has existed far longer than most acknowledge.

Given the level of nonsense in it, it is perhaps understandable why Proudhon did not bother replying – if personal and political events had not made responding difficult, he surely would have thought no one who has read his book would take it seriously. He was right – except that the two volumes of *System of Economic Contradictions* are not an easy book and few readers of Marx bother to compare him to what Proudhon actually wrote. All in all, the words of scientist (and, obviously, non-anarchist) Richard Dawkins against one of his critics are applicable here:

“we are in danger of assuming that nobody would dare to be so rude without taking the elementary precaution of being right”. (“In Defence of Selfish Genes,” pp. 556-573, *Philosophy*, Vol. 56, No. 218, p. 556)

Given that many Marxists regurgitate previous attacks on anarchism when putting pen to paper, it is not academic or obscure to discuss things like this. The echoes of Marx’s 1847 book are still being heard today and it aids our current activity and theory to understand what was wrong with that critique and subsequent ones. To not know our own history, to not know our own theorists, means being at a disadvantage against those who pretend to do.

Beyond the dishonesty, Marx’s work is of note for the alternative he sketched to Proudhon’s market socialism – and “sketched” is being generous. It amounts to a few sentences and is rooted in generalising from an example of two workers and two products to an economy of millions of workers and products. Given this, perhaps it is not surprising that the Bolshevik experiment failed so spectacularly – Marx clearly had no notion of the need for gathering,

processing and implementing the information required for central planning. He and Engels always presented this process as simple rather than the bureaucratic nightmare it would be.

It should be said that Marx did make contributions to socialism and the understanding of capitalism. Even Bakunin recognised this and said so, repeatedly. This should not stop us recognising that he built upon an analysis started by others (not least, Proudhon) and that his arguments for practical activity were deeply flawed. Bakunin, not Marx, was right about the fate of “political action” (in reformism) and the “dictatorship of the proletariat” (in tyranny).

So on the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, we can but hope that socialists will reflect on the ideological roots for the failure rather than seek solace in the post-hoc rationalisations began by Trotsky. After all, the Bolsheviks remained true to the vision of a centralised economic system based on nationalisation. As with Marx, workers’ self-management of production did not figure highly (if at all) in Bolshevik visions of “socialism” – unlike anarchists from Proudhon onwards. Similarly, they remained true to the vision of centralised, hierarchical and unitarian political structure even if it were based, nominally, on working class organisations, the soviets (workers councils), rather than the orthodox Marxist position of capturing and transforming the current State (see [section H.3.10](#)). As Kropotkin put it:

“It is therefore essential that to free themselves the masses who produce everything without being allowed to control the consumption of what they produce, find the means which enable them to display their creative forces and to develop themselves new, egalitarian, forms of consumption and of production.

“The State and national representation cannot find these forms. It is the very *life* of the consumer and of the producer, his intellect, his organising spirit which must find them and improve them by applying them to the daily needs of life.

“It is the same for forms of political organisation. In order to free themselves from the exploitation they are subjected to under the supervision of the State, the masses cannot remain under the domination of the forms which prevent the blossoming of popular initiative. These were developed by governments to perpetuate the servitude of the people, to *prevent it from letting its creative force blossom* and to develop institutions of egalitarian mutual aid. New forms must be found to serve the opposite goal.” (*La Science moderne et l’anarchie* [Paris: Stock, 1913], p. 323)

This means that the Russian experience has confirmed that socialism has to be free – libertarian – or not at all. Sadly, unlike when AFAQ was started 21 years ago, “libertarian” has become increasingly associated with the right in Britain as it has in the United States. This is of obvious concern for all genuine libertarians. I have addressed the history of libertarian in *AFAQ* and its blog, which – like the revision of non-published appendices – has been somewhat quiet of late. An obvious exception was the posting of [160 years of Libertarian](#) this year to mark the coining of *libertaire* by Joseph Déjacque. As well as including a new and complete translation of Déjacque’s 1857 “Open Letter” to Proudhon, it covers anarchist use of the term and the right’s attempt to steal the word.

Suffice to say, the mess which is Wikipedia's entry on "libertarian" shows how distinct Anarchism is from Liberalism – unsurprisingly, given that Proudhon's seminal *What is Property?* and other works are obviously an extended critique of (classical) liberalism. For the right, "liberty" means little more than those with private power being able to restrict the freedom of the rest. What is annoying is that they use the good word "libertarian" to describe this regime of private power. Kropotkin's words from 1913 are still as relevant now as then:

"In today's society, where no one is allowed to use the field, the factory, the instruments of labour, unless he acknowledge himself the inferior, the subject of some Sir – servitude, submission, lack of freedom, the practice of the whip are *imposed* by the very form of society. By contrast, in a communist society which recognises the right of everyone, on an egalitarian basis, to all the instruments of labour and to all the means of existence that society possesses, the only men on their knees in front of others are those who are by their nature voluntary serfs. Each being equal to everyone else as far as the right to well-being is concerned, he does not have to kneel before the will and arrogance of others and so secures equality in all personal relationships with his co-members.

"[...] We finally realise now that without communism man will never be able to reach that full development of individuality which is, perhaps, the most powerful desire of every thinking being. It is highly probably that this essential point would have been recognised for some time if we had not always confused *individuation* – that is to say, the complete development of individuality – with *individualism*. Now, individualism – it is high time to understand this – is nothing but the *Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost* of the bourgeoisie, who believed to find in it the means of freeing himself from society by imposing on workers economic serfdom under the protection of the State" (Op. Cit., pp. 163-5)

Of course, thanks to Bolshevism, "communism" is usually viewed to mean central-planning (or what Anarchists more accurately call State-capitalism – see [section H.3.13](#)) but we should not forget that Kropotkin simply meant distribution according to *need* rather than *deed*: which was what Joseph Déjacque had argued for in 1857 against Proudhon's market socialism (distribution according to the products of labour). Nor should we forget the desire for genuine freedom, for the free association of equals rather than that of master-servants driven by economic necessity, which inspired the coining of the term "libertarian" in 1857 and its subsequent embrace by Anarchists world-wide. Hopefully recounting the origins of the word, showing how and why the proprietarians stole it, will make more people refuse to let the right use it – we can only hope that by 40th anniversary of AFAQ they will be called proprietarians by all...

Finally, it is also 175 years from Kropotkin's birth. I'm glad to note that the all-too-common notion of Kropotkin as "the gentle sage" is being replaced by a more accurate account of his politics. Rather than being one of the best served Anarchist thinkers in terms of their works, only a fraction of his writings is available in English. His articles for French, British and Russian anarchist papers are still mostly unknown and even his final book, the last book published in his lifetime, 1913's *La Science moderne et l'anarchie* has never been translated in full (although I have been working to remedy that and next year, 2018, will see AK Press finally publish *Modern Science and Anarchy* in English translation).

So our understanding of Kropotkin's works is to some degree incomplete. Many accounts of his ideas are based on his most general works, which cannot help but skew our understanding of his ideas. In short, his works most focused on the labour movement have not generally been published as pamphlets and when they have (such as the English-language work "Politics and Socialism") they have rarely been reprinted. These articles help flesh out why Anarchists are against the State, against using it to abolish capitalism, and what our alternative to electioneering is (see [section J](#)).

Rather than oppose the State for idealistic reasons, Anarchist anti-Statism is based on a class analysis of it – the recognition that it exists to impose minority class rule and has developed specific features to do so. This means that utilising the bourgeois State – or a State, like the Bolsheviks, marked by centralisation and unitarian structures – will not create socialism. This is because the modern State is first and foremost a *bourgeois* structure:

“the State, with its hierarchy of functionaries and the weight of its historical traditions, could only delay the dawning of a new society freed from monopolies and exploitation [...] what means can the State provide to abolish this monopoly that the working class could not find in its own strength and groups? [...] what advantages could the State provide for abolishing these same privileges? Could its governmental machine, developed for the creation and upholding of these privileges, now be used to abolish them? Would not the new function require new organs? And these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in *their* unions, *their* federations, completely outside the State?” (Kropotkin, Op. Cit., pp. 91-2)

This shows the alternative to social democracy, namely militant labour struggle: what became known as syndicalism – although, as *Direct Struggle Against Capital* shows, Kropotkin had advocated it in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The notion that there is a fundamental difference between anarchism and syndicalism cannot be supported (see [section H.2.8](#)). True, anarchism was initially reformist (Proudhon was opposed to strikes) but modern, revolutionary, anarchism was born in the First International and took a syndicalist position from the start. Kropotkin, like other revolutionary anarchists, took this “Bakuninist” position – although, like Bakunin, he did not think unions *by themselves* would *inevitably* be revolutionary and so also saw the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle (see [section J.3](#)).

Likewise, we should not become fixated on unions for in 1905 – twelve years before Lenin – Kropotkin saw the possibility of the soviets as a means of fighting capitalism and statism and explicitly linked them to the Paris Commune:

“the workers’ Council [...] had been appointed by the workers themselves – just like the insurrectional Commune of August 10, 1792 – [...] This very much reminds us of the Central Committee which preceded the Paris Commune of 1871, and it is certain that workers across the country should organise on this model [...] these councils represent the revolutionary strength of the working class. [...]

“This is direct action at work [...] Let it not then be said that the workers of the Latin nations, by preaching the general strike and direct action, have taken the wrong path. The Russian working people, by applying these for

themselves, have proven that their brothers in the West were perfectly right. [...] it is certain that the workers who succeeded in forcing the autocracy to capitulate will also force capitalism to do so. They will do more. They will be able to find forms of communal industrial organisation. But first they must first send packing the hypnotisers [*endormeurs*] who tell them: ‘Just make the political revolution; it is too early for the social revolution.’ [...] and while the socialist theoreticians strove to prove the impossibility of any general strike, they, the workers, began to go through the workshops, putting a stop to work everywhere. [...] After a few days, the strike was absolutely general [...] It was a whole people going on strike [...]

“A new force was thus established by the strike: the force of the workers asserting themselves for the first time and setting in motion this lever of any revolution – *direct action*. [...] It is equally obvious, furthermore, that the revolution will not be the work of a few months, but of several years. At the very least, what has been accomplished so far proves that this revolution will be of a social nature [...] bourgeois elements have already faded behind the two great forces of the peasants and the workers, and the two great means of action have been the general strike and direct action.

“There is every reason to believe that the workers of the cities will understand the strength conferred by direct action added to the general strike and, imitating in this the peasant rebels, they will likely be led to get their hands on all that is necessary to live and produce. Then they can lay in the cities the initial foundations of the communist commune.” (“L’Action directe et la Grève générale en Russie,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 December 1905)

This, obviously, is echoed in *La Science moderne et l’anarchie* but it has its origins in the Bakunin and the Federalist wing of the First International, as reflected Kropotkin’s writings on the labour movement from the 1870s onwards (see *Direct Struggle Against Capital* for a representative selection across the decades) and ably explored by Robert Graham in ‘*We Do Not Fear Anarchy – We Invoke It: The First International and the Origins of the Anarchist Movement* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015). As Bakunin put it:

“Workers, no longer count on anyone but yourselves [...] Abstain from all participation in bourgeois radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The basis of that organisation is entirely given: the workshops and the federation of the workshops; the creation of funds for resistance, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation not just nationally, but internationally. The creation of Chambers of Labour [...] the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society [...] Anarchy, that is to say the true, the open popular revolution [...] organisation, from top to bottom and from the circumference to the centre” (“Letter to Albert Richard”, *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 62, p. 18)

Kropotkin also pointed to the neighbourhood assemblies, or sections, of the Great French Revolution as a form of popular self-organisation which anarchists today could learn from (see chapters XXIV and XXV of *The Great French Revolution*, both included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*). In this way would develop “independent Communes for the territorial groupings, and vast federations of trade unions for groupings by social functions –

the two interwoven and providing support to each to meet the needs of society”. Added to these are the “groupings *by personal affinities* – groupings without number, infinitely varied, long-lasting or fleeting, emerging according to the needs of the moment for all possible purposes”. These “three kinds of groupings” would ensure “the satisfaction of all social needs: consumption, production and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection against aggression, mutual aid, territorial defence; the satisfaction, finally, of scientific, artistic, literacy, entertainment needs.” (Kropotkin, *La Science moderne et l’anarchie*, pp. 92-3)

So Kropotkin is very clear that the link between now and the future is forged in the struggle and so – see [section I.2.3](#) – we build the framework of Anarchism by our struggles against Capital, State and other forms of hierarchy (such as patriarchy, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc.). Also of note is his comment that the revolution would not take months, but years. This shows that notions of “overnight” revolution habitually flung at anarchists by Marxists – see [section I.2.2](#) – are nonsense. As such, we must remember that Anarchism is something for the here-and-now and that we must think in terms of a long-term strategy.

All of which points to Kropotkin as a realistic revolutionary and advocate of class struggle as the means of creating a better world rather than some sort of “gentle sage” with utopian visions, as some seem to think (see my [“Kropotkin: Class Warrior”](#), *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 64/5 for a summary). Yet this does not mean we have an “unknown” Kropotkin for his revolutionary class struggle politics were there to be found even in his well-known “general” works if you were prepared to look: sadly, neither the British reformist Anarchists of the post-war period nor the Marxists were going to do that!

So 21 years on, we have a better notion of the Anarchist tradition than ever before and I hope AFAQ played its part in that. Simplistic accounts – which seem to be based on little more than looking up “Anarchism” in the dictionary – should be harder to produce. It will take a particularly studious ignorance to proclaim Anarchism is just “anti-State” given its actual history as a theory and a movement. Still, we can sadly expect the right and left – for their own reasons – to continue to ignore Anarchism’s socialist core. At least we have resources like AFAQ to show the accuracy of such claims.

When AFAQ was started, in the early 1990s, neo-liberalism appeared to be triumphant, “socialism” (i.e., Stalinism) had just collapsed and the “great moderation” was proclaimed. Yet the triumphalism could not hide the problems facing society – not least, the ever-increasing inequality as well as ecological crisis. Come the financial crisis of 2007-8 – caused, in part, because the neo-liberal assault on the working class had been *too* successful – the critique of capitalism and various economic theories developed to defend it AFAQ had summarised proved its usefulness (see [section C](#))

After a rush to State-intervention – blowing the dust of Keynes and, for a few, even Marx – to stabilise the situation (at least for the few), the rush to austerity (at least for the many) began. AFAQ had summarised (in [section C.9.1](#)) why cutting wages would be counter-productive – and so it was. Austerity was proven to be counter-productive, making the situation worse as predicted by anyone who did not worship the holy textbooks of neo-classical or “Austrian” economics – even the most neo-classical Keynesian economist grasped the situation. Yet class interests and its ideologues proved – as would be expected – more significant.

In the UK, the Tories rushed to inflict austerity onto society and blamed a crisis caused by the elite on welfare provision for the many. Unlike in Greece and elsewhere in Europe, austerity was not imposed upon the government by the heavy hand of the EU but was embraced willingly – so killing off a recovery and stalling the economy for two years. When growth finally returned, austerity was proclaimed vindicated in spite of the critics being proven correct. Worse, it returned to trend growth without the higher growth usually associated with an exit from recession. Still, the utter failure of austerity did not stop Tory politicians in the UK proclaiming its necessity years later – while holding up austerity-struck Greece to warn against the horrors of not imposing austerity. Logic and reality will always come a distant last when defending the powers and the profits of the few. Little has changed since 1846 when Proudhon sarcastically noted:

“Political economy — that is, proprietary despotism — can never be in the wrong: it must be the proletariat.” (*Property is Theft!*, p. 187)

The crisis produced popular resistance, although obviously not enough. Anarchists took part in these struggles against austerity. This caused some commentators problems – why were Anarchists protesting against governments seeking to reduce the State? Yet Anarchism has never been just anti-State (surely “property is theft” shows that?). We are against the State because it defends that property and theft, so using economic crisis to impose austerity is State activity simply as a weapon for the few against the many.

Anarchists do not side with the State against its subjects. Rather we fight with our fellow workers against attempts by governments to save capitalism by pushing the costs of so doing onto the general population. This does not mean we favour State welfare any more than any other State activity. Welfare, like the State itself, must be abolished *from below* by the many, not from above by the few seeking to increase their wealth and power (see [section J.5.15](#)). Similarly, the alternative to nationalisation (or bailouts) is not privatisation but rather *socialisation* – workers’ control. As Kropotkin suggested, echoing Proudhon (*General Idea of the Revolution*, p. 151), there is a lack of imagination and class analysis in State socialism:

“Well, it is to increase the capital owned by the modern bourgeois States that the radicals and socialists are working today. They did not even bother to discuss – like English co-operators asked me one day – if there were no way to hand over the railways *directly* to the railway-workers’ trade-unions, to free the enterprise from the yoke of the capitalist, instead of creating a new capitalist, even more dangerous than the bourgeois companies, the State.” (Op. Cit., p. 325)

Needless to say, the much more extensive welfare State for the rich should be targeted for reduction and eventual elimination long before anything else is even considered for reform.

Such popular struggles against privatisation or austerity – against the decisions and actions of the State against its subjects, never forget – will build the confidence and organisations needed to *really* change things, to *really* reduce the authority of the State and win improvements in the here-and-now. Indeed, the UK anti-union laws show that our masters know this, know where *our* real power lies: not in Parliament but in our workplaces and streets. This – direct action and solidarity – is what creates the possibility for revolution.

Neo-liberalism has singularly failed in terms of the promises it made (“trickle down,” its anti-union arguments, productivity growth has trended down since the 1980s, the private profiteering associated with previously nationalised industries, etc., etc., etc.) – however, it did make the rich richer, its usually unstated goal, and all that can be forgiven and forgotten. However, its limitations are being felt – it is in danger of so hollowing out society that capitalism itself is threatened. This is being reflected in the ballot box. As discussed in [section D.1](#), we may be at one of those points where, thanks to popular discontent and the pressing need to maintain the system, the State is used more to repair the damage that an inherently unstable capitalism inflicts on society than it is used to bolster the property and power of the few.

Yet we must never forget the nature of the State as an instrument of minority classes and that there are vested interests at work (see [section B.2](#)). This means that leaving change to politicians will result in little improvement. We need an anti-parliamentary movement:

“We see in the incapacity of the statist socialist to understand the true historical problem of socialism a gross error of judgement [...] To tell the workers that they will be able to introduce the socialist system *while retaining the machine of the State* and only changing the men in power; to prevent, instead of aiding, the mind of the workers progressing towards *the search for new forms of life* that would be *their own* – that is in our eyes a historic mistake which borders on the criminal.” (Kropotkin, Op. Cit., pp. 124-5)

The lesson of both the rise of social democracy at the end of the nineteenth and Bolshevik success in 1917 is that Anarchists need to organise to influence the class struggle, to present a real alternative both in terms of visions of tomorrow *and* how to win improvements today. The latter is more important in many ways for without that we will never be in a position to create the former: we will be an isolated sect complaining from the side-lines rather a key factor in moving society towards freedom. As 1917 shows, without an effective organised anarchist movement then others will take advantage of the situation – by using ideas and actions previously raised by Anarchists – for non-Anarchist ends.

The key, then, is to find positive areas to apply anarchist ideas, to encourage those subject to hierarchies to assert themselves and change themselves while changing their conditions. Only the struggle for freedom can make us able to live as free and equal individuals: that means we need be part of social struggle and self-organisation, in other words we need “Anarchy in Action” (see [section J](#)). Without that, Anarchy remains a dream – and the powers of State and Capital will continue to crush what little freedom we have. Resistance is fertile – and why direct action is always opposed by the authorities and their ideological shrills.

In 2017 it is clear we Anarchists have much to do. Time will tell if we are up to the challenge – but one thing is sure, as Kropotkin said only those who do nothing make no mistakes.

Iain McKay

An Anarchist FAQ

<http://www.anarchistfaq.org>

An Anarchist FAQ after 20 years

It is now 20 years since *An Anarchist FAQ* (AFAQ) was officially launched and six years since the core of it was completed (version 14.0). It has been published by AK Press as well as translated into numerous languages. It has been quoted and referenced by other works. So it has been a success – although when it was started I had no idea what it would end up like.

I am particularly happy that AK Press took the time and invested the resources to turn it into a book. Volume 1 of AFAQ (sections A to F plus the appendix on “The Symbols of Anarchy”) was published in 2008 followed by volume 2 (sections H to J, slightly abridged) in 2012. Both volumes are impressive in both size and presentation – they look lovely.

Since then, though, there has been little done – a revision of an appendix about a laughingly bad Marxist anti-anarchist diatribe (more or less a copy of Hal Draper’s equally bad *Two Souls of Socialism*). The unfinished appendix on the Russian Revolution remains so and the other appendices need to be revised. I hope to correct this by the 30th anniversary of AFAQ but no promises!

In my defence, I have been busy. Numerous other articles and reviews have been produced thanks to the work embodied into AFAQ and it has produced two other books: anthologies of Proudhon’s and Kropotkin’s works (*Property is Theft!* and *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, respectively). Both came about due to the research AFAQ needed – it showed that the picture we had of both key thinkers was not completely accurate. Both confirm the analysis of AFAQ on the nature of anarchism (i.e., libertarian *socialism*) and its history. Both would have been helpful in days-past when debating propertarians (right-wing “libertarians”) and Marxists.

Taking Proudhon, before *Property is Theft!* very little of his voluminous writings had been translated into English and much of his writings – particularly his journalism and polemics during the 1848 revolution – were unknown. We now have a better idea of his ideas and contribution to anarchism as well as allowing various false, but commonplace, assertions about his ideas to be refuted.^[1] Marx’s claim that he advocated “Labour Notes” (i.e., pricing and payment by hours worked) was simply a baseless assertion made in the face of clear evidence in *System of Economic Contradictions* to the opposite (he advocated generalising “bills of exchange” as many commentators correctly noted).^[2] *The Poverty of Philosophy* is, as Proudhon noted at the time, “the libel of one doctor Marx” and should be dismissed as “a tissue of crudities, slanders, falsifications, and plagiarism.”^[3] Sadly, this deeply dishonest work has shaped our perception of Proudhon (even in the anarchist movement) but hopefully the real Proudhon – advocate of self-managed (market) socialism – will become better known.^[4]

It also became clear that those who most loudly proclaimed their allegiance to Proudhon, namely Benjamin Tucker and other (but not all) individualist anarchists, were very selective in what they took from him. Proudhon’s critique of wage-labour and corresponding advocacy of self-management and socialisation were lost on Tucker.^[5] Revolutionary anarchism is closer to Proudhon’s ideas than those who claimed his mantle – but this championing of Proudhon by Tucker shaped how many viewed the Frenchman and yet another false image (albeit less false than the one Marx invented) was created.

Similarly with Kropotkin – while more of his writings were available in English, these were the more general introductions to anarchism and his “day-to-day” journalism in the anarchist press (particularly the French) was unknown. This gave a somewhat skewed impression of his ideas and helped those seeking to portray him as a utopian or reformist (whether Marxists or self-proclaimed anarchists). This was because while the key texts on *ends* were readily available, the texts on *means* were less so. This does not excuse those – like the reformist (“liberal”) wing of British anarchism in the 1960s onwards (and who were readily echoed by Marxists) – who portrayed Kropotkin as anything other than the revolutionary, class struggle anarchist he was for even these general works included references to unions, strikes, insurrections and so forth. Moreover, Caroline Cahm’s excellent book *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886* has shown this aspect of anarchism since 1989 – indeed, *Direct Struggle Against Capital* owes a great deal to her research in tracking down numerous key articles from Kropotkin’s early journalism.

These two works also indicate another improvement over the past 20 years – the increase in good quality research on anarchism and anarchists. We have had Emma Goldman’s papers published while AK Press has just started the publication of Errico Malatesta’s *Collected Works*. Shawn Wilbur continues his sterling work making Proudhon accessible and, moreover, has translated Bakunin’s *Collected Works* for PM Press. Nestor Makhno’s writings and autobiographies are also available in English. To name just a few amongst a host of excellent histories of movements and individuals.

All this is very welcome but more is needed – thinkers like Luigi Fabbri need their works available in English and key source materials (such as James Guillaume’s *L’internationale: documents et souvenirs*) are also in need of translation. Even for figures like Kropotkin, a whole wealth of material in French, Russian and English which remains inaccessible and/or untranslated in archives.^[6] However, such research and translation is time and resource consuming and few anarchists have much of either (being working class people in the main, we need to both earn a living and have a social life). Yet compared to where the movement was when AFAQ was started, we have seen significant progress. I hope that my work has helped this in some way. One thing is sure, AFAQ does save a lot of time because it can be referenced when the all-too-often myths about anarchism are raised (yet again!) by Marxists, proprietarians and others.

As with any project, once it was completed I realised how I should have started. What is clear now is that the usual account of anarchism which starts in the distant past before discussing William Godwin and Max Stirner is not right. Regardless of their merits, neither of these people influenced the rise of anarchism as a theory or a movement. Indeed, both were discovered by a fully developed anarchist movement in the 1890s and, ironically, the only impact Stirner had in his lifetime was on Marx and what became Marxism (needless to say, Marx distorted Stirner’s ideas just as much as he did Proudhon’s or Bakunin’s).

Anarchism developed in the context of the French workers’ movement and so embodied the legacies of the French Revolution (and its “Anarchists”) as well as the critique of liberalism and capitalism current within French radical circles. Proudhon’s seminal *What is Property?* was not written in a social vacuum nor did his ideas develop without a social and intellectual context. Anarchism, then, was born in the context of the rising labour movement. It flows from the associationist ideas raised by French workers faced with industrialisation – that is, proletarianisation. They rejected the inequalities and hierarchies associated with the rise of

capitalism as sought to apply democratic ideas within the workplace and so abolish wage-labour by association.

This reflected workers during the Great French Revolution about whom one building employer moaned, “by an absurd parody of the government, regard their work as their property, the building site as a Republic of which they are jointly citizens, and believe in consequence that it belongs to them to name their own bosses, their inspectors and arbitrarily to share out the work amongst themselves.”[\[7\]](#) Proudhon echoed this position repeatedly throughout his works:

“Workers’ Associations are the locus of a new principle and model of production that must replace present-day corporations [...] The principle that prevailed there, in place of that of employers and employees [...] is participation [...] There is mutuality, in fact, when in an industry, all the workers, instead of working for an owner who pays them and keeps their product, work for one another and thereby contribute to a common product from which they share the profit.”[\[8\]](#)

Workers’ self-management of production by means of associations has been a part of anarchism *from the start* (from *What is Property?*: “leaders [...] must be chosen from the workers by the workers themselves”[\[9\]](#)) and any form of “anarchism” which rejects this in favour of factory fascism (wage-labour) is hardly libertarian.

This means that the all-too-common notion of anarchism being a fusion (confusion!) of “socialism” (presumably Marxism) and liberalism is simply wrong. Anarchism is a school of socialism (“the no-government system of socialism”, to quote Kropotkin[\[10\]](#)) and cut its teeth critiquing liberalism and the class-ridden, unequal and unfree society it was creating. It was then members of this well-defined movement who could look back at the likes of Godwin and popular movements note similarities between their ideas on the state, property, etc. and those which had arisen later and, crucially, independently of them. These pre-1840 thinkers and movements can be better described as anarchistic rather than anarchist as such.

This analysis of where anarchism comes from is relevant to current events. Take inequality, or more correctly the recognition within mainstream politics and journalism that massive inequality exists and is rising. When AFAQ was started, this was generally denied but now the recognition of reality is at least acknowledged and, often, deplored, by some of the elite (usually politicians seeking votes). The denials of reality could be surreal – I remember reading an edition of the *Economist* at the turn of the millennium which had editorialised that the 20th century had shown Marx’s predictions of a tiny minority of wealthy capitalists surrounded by a sea of impoverished proletarians to be false while, a few pages elsewhere, had a report on how inequality in America and elsewhere in the West had exploded so resulting in a few very wealthy people and the rest stagnating. The contradiction between ideology (faith) and reality (facts) could not have been more obvious – at least if you weren’t the editors or a true believer in capitalism.

Perhaps needless to say, the reasons why this has happened have been much discussed but as it has been within a neo-classical framework it has not gotten very far. This is understandable as that ideology was developed precisely to rationalise and justify the inequalities of capitalism and not to explain them (see [section C](#)). Taking an anarchist analysis (as first expounded by Proudhon before being taken up by Marx) it is easy to understand why

inequality has expounded. As [section C.2](#) indicates, labour is exploited by capital and the former has been weakened over the last four decades by neo-liberalism (not least by increased state regulation of unions) and so workers cannot retain more of the value we produce as the product is monopolised by the owning class and senior management.

This means, for example, that the exploding wages of CEOs is *not* an example of “market failure” as some claim but rather an expression of how the capitalist market *is meant to work*.[\[11\]](#) Which all flows back to where anarchism came from, namely the (French) workers’ movement, and what it was born fighting, namely a rising capitalism and its ideological expression of (classical) liberalism.

Thus we find John Locke’s *just-so* story justifying property results “by a tacit and voluntary consent” to “a disproportionate and unequal Possession of the Earth”[\[12\]](#) Yet any agreement between the owners and proletariat would favour the former and once the worker has consented to being under the authority of the wealthy then her labour and its product is no longer hers: “Thus the grass my horse has bit; the Turfs my Servant has cut; and the Ore I have digg’d... become my *Property*.” The workers’ labour “hath fixed my [the employer’s] property” in both the product and common resources worked upon.[\[13\]](#) Locke’s defence of property as resting on labour becomes the means to derive the worker of the full product of her labour[\[14\]](#) – as intended.

Compare this with anarchism. Proudhon’s analysis brings him into conflict with Locke and the liberal tradition. Rejecting the notion that master-servant contracts were valid, he dismisses its basis of property in the person in a few words: “To tell a poor man that he has property because he has arms and legs, – that the hunger from which he suffers, and his power to sleep in the open air are his property, – is to play with words, and add insult to injury.” Property, then, is solely material things – land, workplaces, etc. – and their monopolisation results in authoritarian relationships. To “recognise the right of territorial property is to give up labour, since it is to relinquish the means of labour”, which results in the worker having “sold and surrendered his liberty” to the proprietor. This alienation of liberty is the means by which exploitation happens. Whoever “labours becomes a proprietor” of his product but by that Proudhon did “not mean simply (as do our hypocritical economists)” – and Locke – the “proprietor of his allowance, his salary, his wages” but “proprietor of the value which he creates, and by which the master alone profits.” Locke is also clearly the target for Proudhon’s comment that “the horse [...] and ox [...] produce with us, but are not associated with us; we take their product, but do not share it with them. The animals and workers whom we employ hold the same relation to us.”[\[15\]](#)

As noted, the rise in inequality is even acknowledged by those who helped create it. Thus we find the *Economist*[\[16\]](#) admitting that “Liberalism depends on a belief in progress but, for many voters, progress is what happens to other people. While American GDP per person grew by 14% in 2001-15, median wages grew by only 2%.” The journal also states that “liberals also need to restore social mobility and ensure that economic growth translates into rising wages” yet social mobility falling while inequality rises should be unsurprising (it is easier to climb a hill than a mountain) as is the awkward fact that the least “liberal” nations (continental Europe) have higher social mobility than the USA or UK (“liberal” nations). As for increasing wages, the neo-liberal agenda has been to regulate workers and our unions by anti-union laws to stop just that happening which makes a mockery of the claim that “[i]n the 1970s liberals concluded that the embrace of the state had become smothering and oppressive.”[\[17\]](#) It is not hard to conclude that for “liberals” state intervention against

workers is just normal – just like defence of capitalist property-rights is not oppressive. Rest assured, their solution to the problems caused by neo-liberalism is yet more neo-liberalism: “a relentless focus on dismantling privilege by battling special interests, exposing incumbent companies to competition and breaking down restrictive practices.” Which was, as discussed in [section J.4.2](#), the rhetoric used to increase state regulation of unions which, in turn, produced all the evils the journal is bemoaning now and which are the opposite outcome to those promised to justify this onslaught on working people and our organisations.

We should not be surprised. Let us not forget that belief is defined as “an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof” (such as Locke’s stories which underlie liberalism in all its forms, particularly propertarianism). Anarchists, however, prefer to study the facts and draw conclusions based on them. The facts of the last few decades clearly support Proudhon’s analysis – rising productivity and level wages show that workers are exploited in production and allows the few to monopolise the gains derived from productivity increases. He also indicated in *System of Economic Contradictions* how the favoured “solution” of liberalism – more competition – resulted in monopolies (i.e., big companies) which meant that the amount of investment needed to enter the market was an objective barrier which, as well as reducing competition, turned the bulk of the population into wage-workers who have “sold their arms and parted with their liberty” to the few.[\[18\]](#)

Thus the social question remains fundamentally the same as when Proudhon took pen to paper. As is its answer: to end these social problems means ending master-servant relations within the workplace by means of association and abolishing the state that protects them by means of federalism. An account of anarchism which ignores all this would be a travesty and produce false picture of what anarchism is and *what counts as anarchist*.[\[19\]](#) Sadly, this false picture still exists in academic and other works – based on little more than if someone calls themselves an anarchist then they are. Few (bar the propertarians who fail to recognise the oxymoronic nature of “anarcho”-capitalism) would tolerate adding Nazism to accounts of socialism based on them having “socialist” in their party name – but even this low bar seems to be considered too high for some when it comes to discussing anarchism!

AFAQ was started in the early 1990s, just after the collapse of Stalinism (“socialism” or “communism”) and the corresponding triumphalism of neo-liberals. Japanese-style corporate capitalism was in its “lost decade” and neo-liberalism was being accepted as “common-sense” within the leadership of the “official” opposition (the British Labour Party and its equivalents elsewhere). Yet within ten years, we had the bursting of the dot com bubble and a deep crisis in East-Asia. The latter saw economies previously praised by advocates of capitalism as being a heaven of “free-market” policies become, overnight, statist nightmares. Such is the power of ideology.

Then came the crisis of 2007-8, a crisis caused by neo-liberal policies which – incredible as it may seem – became the means of imposing more of said policies in the name of “Austerity”. The Tories in the UK were particularly good (if that is the right word!) at turning a crisis caused by the 1% and their favoured policies into one apparently caused by New Labour not letting single mothers starve. While the narrative of the crisis turned the facts on their head, they could not stop the policies being implemented dragging out the crisis and turning it into the slowest recovery on record. So the financial crisis showed the bankruptcy of neo-classical economics in two senses. First, mainstream economists did not predict it (while post-Keynesian economists did). Second, the notion of “expansionary austerity” was tried and proven to be as nonsensical as even the mainstream (“bastard”) Keynesians predicted.

This resulted in a downward spiral whenever it was tried – whether Greece or the UK (so confirming [section C.9](#) of AFAQ). However, the critics being proven correct was not considered good enough and so when growth – finally! – returned to the UK, the architects of this harmful policy were proclaimed by the much of mainstream press (including the *Financial Times*) to have been vindicated! Why? Simply because, as with Milton Friedman (see [section C.8](#)), the Tories made the rich richer and skewed state intervention even further towards the few.[\[20\]](#)

The global economic crisis rolls on – a classic example, as per [section C.7](#), of a crisis caused by labour being too weak. We have seen the “traditional” left ride the wave of protest in many countries and divert it into parliamentary avenues – were it quickly died. The example of Greece is the classic example with a left-wing anti-austerity party (Syriza) elected only for it to end up imposing even more stringent austerity measures than before. This confirmed our analysis in [section J.2](#) of AFAQ on why anarchists reject electioneering and support direct action. The pressures on left-wing governments from big business and capital, the willingness the state bureaucracy (the civil service, etc.) to frustrate the policies and decisions of popularly elected governments, all played their role even without the years of campaigning for votes which have traditionally watered-down radical parties long before they achieve office (but not *real* power). Still, we are sure the true-believers will proclaim that *next* time they will not make the same mistakes as the Social Democrats, the Greens, and now Syriza. And state socialists call anarchists utopians...

So while proclaiming itself “Scientific Socialism” (an expression, like so much of Marxism, appropriated from Proudhon), its adherents seem wonderfully immune from learning from experience. Marxism continues, albeit in smaller numbers, to put countless numbers off socialism by presenting the cure (socialism) as being worse than the disease (capitalism). This may explain why Marxists so regularly distort anarchist ideas – if Marxism were so robust they would have no need to invent nonsense about anarchism. Yet they do – and [section H.2](#) continues to be of use in replying to them. It may also explain why some Marxists prefer to invoke the Spanish Revolution than the Russian (understandably given how bad Lenin’s regime was!) or seek to associate their ideology with far more appealing forms of socialism (such as syndicalism[\[21\]](#)). Again, AFAQ is there to show the flaws in such attempts – and to show that much of what passes for “Marxism” was first expounded by anarchists[\[22\]](#) but without the authoritarian and metaphysical baggage.

Anarchists have long critiqued state socialism but on the assumption (sometimes unstated or mentioned in passing) that we were the genuine socialists. The logic is simple enough – the state is a hierarchical body and so based on inequality and so state socialism violated socialist principles (namely, equality) and could not, therefore, produce a socialist society. This was based on empirical evidence which shows that states developed to impose minority rule and the conclusion that, as a result, it cannot be used to end it. As Proudhon argued:

“And who benefits from this regime of unity? The people? No, the upper classes [...] Unity, today and since 1815, is quite simply a form of bourgeois exploitation under the protection of bayonets. Yes, political unity, in the great States, is bourgeois: the positions which it creates, the intrigues which it causes, the influences which it cherishes, all that is bourgeois and goes to the bourgeois.”[\[23\]](#)

Even if we smash the existing state and replace it with a new one (marked, like all states, by centralisation and hierarchy, even an elected one) then it will just reproduce a new class system (this is a major theme of [section H](#)). The centralised, hierarchical, state is “the cornerstone of bourgeois despotism and exploitation”[\[24\]](#) and “nothing resembles a monarchy more than a unitarian republic [*république unitaire*].”[\[25\]](#) It would be wishful thinking to conclude that an institutional structure so well suited to minority rule could produce a classless society and, as the Bolshevik regime showed ([section H.6](#)), we anarchists were proven correct.

Yet with Leninism and Social-Democracy becoming so dominant, anarchists often stopped calling themselves socialists or communists in order to distance themselves (understandably!) from both. If most people understood “communism” to be the Soviet Union then talking about a libertarian, or free, communism may be confusing. Similarly, if “socialism” meant centralisation and nationalisation (rather than federalism and workers’ self-management) or slowly making capitalism slightly better (rather than replacing it with something better) then it is understandable that some anarchists would drop the term. Simply put the anarchist vision of socialism was at odds with what most people considered it to mean:

“socialism is... the extinction of poverty, the elimination of capitalism and of wage labour, the transformation of property, the decentralisation of government, the organisation of universal suffrage, the effective and direct sovereignty of the workers, the balance of economic forces, the substitution of the contractual regime for the legal regime, etc., etc.”[\[26\]](#)

Sadly, some took anti-statism as the defining characteristic of anarchism and forgot the underlying assumption of socialism. AFAQ showed that this was not the case. It also debunked the nonsense of “anarcho”-capitalism (in [section F](#)) and subsequent research has shown that the notion of a non-socialist “anarchism” is at odds with the history of anarchism as both a theory and a movement. Even the individualist anarchists – who were the closest to classical liberalism – rejected capitalist property-rights and recognised that capitalism exploited the worker (see [section G](#)). Ignoring this Proudhon-influenced analysis and the rough equality its advocate’s expected it to produce results in something very much at odds with their aspirations. However, “anarcho”-capitalists are, as when AFAQ was started, just an annoyance for a few zealots on the internet and some academics funded by propertarian “think-tanks” or wealthy backers does not equate to a movement – particularly given the obvious theoretical contradiction between claiming to be “libertarian” while supporting *authoritarian* social relationships (namely, private hierarchies – [section B.1](#)). As Kropotkin summarised:

“They understand that, as they live amidst *sociable* creatures, such as men are, they never would free themselves if they tried to free *themselves alone*, individually, without taking the others into account. To have the individual free, they must strive to constitute *a society of equals*, wherein *every one* would be possessed of *equal rights* to the treasuries of knowledge and to the immense wealth accumulated by mankind and its civilisation, *wherein nobody should be compelled to sell his labour* (and consequently, to a certain degree, his personality) to those who intend to exploit him.

“This is why Anarchy necessarily is *Communist*, why it was born amidst the international Socialist movement, and why an individualist, if he intends to remain Individualist, cannot be an Anarchist.

“He who intends to retain *for himself* the monopoly of any piece of land or property, or any other portion of the social wealth, *will be bound to look for some authority* which could guarantee to him possession of this piece of land, or this portion of the modern machinery – so as to enable him to compel others to work for him.

“Either the individual will join a society of which all the members own, all together, such a territory, such machinery, such roads, and so on, and utilise them for the life of all – *and then he will be a Communist*; or he will apply to some sort of authority, placed above society, and obtain from it the right of taking, for his *own exclusive and permanent use*, such a portion of the territory or the social wealth. *And then he will NOT be an Anarchist: he will be an authoritarian.*”[\[27\]](#)

Hopefully academics will do their research and start to exclude “anarcho”-capitalism from accounts of anarchism and start to note how right-wing “libertarians” have twisted the meaning of the word in order to defend various *private* authoritarian social relationships (not least those associated with property). Sadly, given the quality of most works on anarchism, this hope may be unfilled – but at least AFAQ exists to show those interested what anarchism really stands for.

Still, there seems to be an improvement within academic circles – perhaps because there has been an increase in anarchist academics? This can be seen by many important works which have increased our understanding of both anarchist thinkers and movements and which have been published, often by AK Press, in cheaper editions. So in terms of serious research, anarchism is being better served than was often the case in the past – myths are being debunked and I hope AFAQ has played its part in that.

Yet theory without practice is of little use and producing accurate accounts of past anarchists and movements, while important, does not bring anarchy closer. Twenty years is a long time and there is still no sign of the social revolution – although social revolts continue aplenty! Does this mean AFAQ was a waste of time? Far from it! To think that misunderstands what anarchism is – it is not a vision of a “perfect” society but rather a movement aiming to change the world for the better. Sometimes our resistance – like the class struggle it is part of – is small-scale, invisible, securing minor victories or just slowing down the decisions of the powerful (whether the state or the boss). Sometimes our resistance explodes into the public and the revolt becomes newsworthy. Regardless of the size of activity, anarchists work today to make the world a bit more libertarian. As Kropotkin put it:

“Anarchists are thus forced to work without respite and without delay [...]

“They must reaffirm the main philosophical cornerstones of Anarchy. They must incorporate scientific methods, for these will help to reshape ideas: the myths of history will be debunked, along with those of social economy and philosophy [...]

“They must participate in the daily struggle against oppression and prejudice in order to maintain a spirit of revolt everywhere people feel oppressed and possess the courage to rise up.

“They must thwart the clever machinations of all those parties who were once allies but who now are hostile, who seek now to divert onto authoritarian paths those movements which were originally spawned in revolt against the oppression of Capital and State.

“And finally [...] they have to find, within the practice of life itself and indeed working through their own experiences, new ways in which social formations can be organised, be they centred on work, community or region, and how these might emerge in a liberated society, freed from the authority of governments and those who would subject us to poverty and hunger.”[\[28\]](#)

If AFAQ has helped some people to join the struggle, to defend and extend what freedoms we have, to combat inequality in wealth and power, then it has been a worthwhile project even if an anarchist society remains an inspiration rather than a reality. It has brought that society a bit closer by showing the world what anarchism actually is, by debunking myths, by showing that there is an alternative and how the struggles of today create it to some degree.

For never forget that we create the new world when we resist the old. Even today we have the choice of acting in a libertarian manner or in an authoritarian one: we can organise with our fellow workers to resist the oppression and exploitation of our bosses – or be servile, know our place and grumble over low wages; we can resist the decisions of politicians by organising our communities – or wait quietly for four years to vote for the lesser evil; we can take to the streets in protest at the murderous results of racism – or just turn the channel and hope you will remain unaffected; we can struggle against patriarchy – or remain quiet; we can fight to ensure everyone can be themselves – or acquiesce to “popular” prejudices; we can encourage co-operative alternatives to wage-labour, landlordism and officialdom – or quietly consume while muttering about being ripped off.

Choose!

Iain McKay

End Notes

[\[1\]](#) See my [“Proudhon on Race and the Civil War: Neither Washington nor Richmond”](#), **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 60

[\[2\]](#) See my [“Proudhon’s constituted value and the myth of labour notes”](#), **Anarchist Studies**, forthcoming 2017. [now published: [“Proudhon’s Constituted Value and the Myth of Labour Notes”](#), **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 25, No. 1]

[\[3\]](#) **Correspondance** (Paris: Lacroix, 1875) II: 267-8

[\[4\]](#) See my [“Laying the Foundations: Proudhon’s Contribution to Anarchist Economics”](#), **Accumulation of Freedom: Writings on Anarchist Economics**

(Oakland/Edinburgh/Baltimore: AK Press, 2012), Anthony J. Nocella, Deric Shannon and John Asimakopoulos (Editors), 64-78

[5] See my [“Proudhon, Property and Possession”](#), **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 66

[6] See my [“Sages and movements: An incomplete Peter Kropotkin bibliography”](#), **Anarchist Studies**, Vol. 22 No. 1 and [“Kropotkin, Woodcock and Les Temps Nouveaux”](#), **Anarchist Studies**, Vol. 23. No. 1)

[7] quoted by Roger Magraw, **A History of the French Working Class** (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992) I: 24-25

[8] **Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology**, 616

[9] Proudhon, **Op Cit.**, 119

[10] **Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings**, 46

[11] See my [“Pay Inequality: Where it comes from and what to do about it”](#), **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 58

[12] John Locke, **Two Treatises of Government** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 302

[13] Locke, 289

[14] C. B Macpherson, **The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 214-5

[15] **Property is Theft!**, 95, 106, 117, 114, 129

[16] [“The politics of anger”](#), **The Economist**, July 2016

[17] See my [“Poor Adam Smith”](#), **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 66

[18] **Property is Theft!**, 212

[19] See my [“Anarchism in the 21st Century”](#), **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 67

[20] See my [“Boomtime in Poundland: Has Austerity Worked?”](#), **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 63

[21] See my [“Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism”](#), **Anarchist Studies**, Vol. 20 No. 1 for one example.

[22] For a summary, see my [“Anarchist Theory: Use it or Lose it”](#), **Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, No. 57

[23] **La fédération et l'unité en Italie** (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862), 27-8

[24] Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, 33

[25] Proudhon, **Du principe fédératif** (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862), 140

[26] Proudhon, “*Les Confessions d’un révolutionnaire*”, **Oeuvres complètes de P.-J. Proudhon** 9: 306

[27] “*A Few Thoughts on the Essence of Anarchism*”, **Direct Action Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology**, 202-3

[28] “*The Anarchist Principle*”, **Op Cit.**, 200