

INALIENABLE TENETS OF ANARCHISM

- Albert Meltzer

That People are Born Free

Our rights are inalienable. Each person born on the world is heir to all the preceding generations. The whole world is ours by right of birth alone. Duties imposed as obligations or ideals, such as patriotism, duty to the State, worship of God, submission to higher classes or authorities, respect for inherited privileges, are lies.

If People are Born Free, Slavery is Murder

Nobody is fit to rule anybody else. It is not alleged that people are perfect, or that merely through his/her natural goodness (or lack of same) he/she should (or should not) be permitted to rule. Rule as such causes abuse. There are no superpeople nor privileged classes who are above 'imperfect Humanity' and are capable or entitled to rule the rest of us. Submission to slavery means surrender of life.

As Slavery is Murder, so Property is Theft

The fact that people cannot enter into their natural inheritance means that part of it has been taken from him or her, either by means of force (old, legalised conquest or robbery) or fraud (persuasion that the State or its servants or an inherited property owning class is entitled to privilege). All present systems of ownership mean that some are deprived of the fruits of their labour. It is true that, in a competitive society, only the possession of independent means enables one to be free of the economy (that is what Proudhon meant when, addressing himself to the self-employed artisan, he said "property is liberty", which seems at first sight a contradiction with his dictum that it was theft). But the principle of ownership, in that which concerns the community, still remains at the bottom of inequity.

If Property is Theft, Government is Tyranny

If we accept the principle of a socialised society, and abolish hereditary privilege and dominant classes, the State becomes unnecessary. If the State is retained, unnecessary government becomes tyranny since the governing body has no other way to maintain its hold. "Liberty without socialism is exploitation: socialism without liberty is tyranny" (Bakunin).

If Government is Tyranny, Anarchy is Liberty

Those who use the word "Anarchy" to mean disorder or misrule are not incorrect. If they regard government as necessary, if they think we could not live without Whitehall directing our affairs, if they think politicians are essential to our well-being and that we could not behave socially without police, they are right in assuming that Anarchy means the opposite to what government guarantees. But those who have the reverse opinion and consider government to be tyranny, are right too in considering Anarchy (no government) to be liberty. If government is the maintenance of privilege and exploitation and inefficiency of distribution, then Anarchy is order.

ORGANISATION AND ANARCHISM

Those belonging to or coming from authoritarian parties find it hard to accept that one can organise without 'some form' of government. Therefore they conclude, and it is a general argument against Anarchism, that 'Anarchists do not believe in organisation'. But government is of people, organisation is of things.

There is a belief that Anarchists 'break up other people's organisations but are unable to build their own' often expressed where dangerous, hierarchical or useless organisations dominate and prevent libertarian ones being created. It can well be admitted that particular people in particular places have failed in the task of building Anarchist organisations but in many parts of the world they do exist.

An organisation may be democratic or dictatorial, it may be authoritarian or libertarian, and there are many libertarian organisations, not necessarily Anarchist, which prove that all organisation need not be run from the top downwards.

Many trade unions, particularly if successful, in order to keep their movement disciplined and an integral part of capitalist society, become (if they do not start so) authoritarian; but how many employers' organisations impose similar discipline? If they do their affiliates would walk out if it did not suit their interests. They must come to free agreement because some have the means to resist intimidation. Even when they resort to fascism to keep the workers down, the employers retain their own independence and financial power; nazism goes too far for smaller capitalists in that after having crushed the workers it also limits, or even negates, the independence of the class that put it in power.

Only the most revolutionary unions of the world have ever learned how to keep the form of organisation of mass labour movements on an informal basis, with a minimum of central administration, and with every decision referred back to the workers on the shop floor. The importance of the "base" is a theme that runs through the discussions of the CNT and the IWW and remains perhaps the central problem that Anarchists have to grapple with if they are to really achieve mass support, be it in Unions or any other type of fighting organisations.

Non-Violence

Is pacifism a trend within Anarchism? Though phoney Anarchism contains a large streak of pacifism, being militant liberalism and renouncing any form of positive action for Anarchism, pacifism (implying extreme non-violence, and not just anti-militarism) is authoritarian. The cult of extreme non-violence always implies an elite, the Satyagrahi of Gandhi for instance, who keep everyone else in check either by force or by moral persuasion. The general history of the orthodox pacifist movements is that they attempt to dilute a revolutionary upsurge but come down on the side of force either in an imperialist war or by condoning aggressive actions by governments they support.

Both India and Israel were once the realisation of the pacifist ideal; the atom bomb was largely developed and created by non-violent pacifists and by League of Nations enthusiasts; the Quakers as peace-loving citizens but commercial tyrants and colonialists are notorious. In recent times, many who rejected Anarchist actions of the Spanish Resistance (though claiming to be "non-violent Anarchists") had no difficulty later in supporting far more "violent" actions of different nationalist movements.

It is true to say that there are Anarchists who consider pacifism compatible with Anarchism in the sense that they advocate the use of non-violent methods though usually nowadays advocating this on the grounds of expediency or tactics rather than principle. But this should not be confused with the so-called "Tolstoyan Anarchism" (neither Tolstoyan nor Anarchist). Tolstoy considered the Anarchists were right in everything but that they believed in revolution to achieve it. His idea of social change was "within one" (which is to say in the sky). He did not advocate non-violent revolution, he urged non-resistance as a way of life compatible with Christian teaching though not practised as such.

One has to say also that this refers to pacifism in the Anglo-American sense, somewhat worse in Great Britain where the concept of legalised conscientious objection led to a dialogue between pacifism and the State. In countries where objection to military service remained a totally illegal act, the concept of pacifism is not necessarily extreme non-violence.

Immediate Aims of the Anarchist

A "reformist" is not someone who brings about reforms (usually they do not, they divert attention to political manoeuvring): it is someone who can see no further than amelioration of certain parts of the system. It is necessary to agitate for the abolition of certain laws, or for the immediate reform of some, but to idealise the agitation for reforms, or even the interests in reform of minorities or even whole communities, is reformist. This reformism has permeated the whole of what is now called the left wing. It creates new industries in the interests of aspiring bureaucrats allegedly guarding over minority interests, preventing people in those minorities from acting on their own behalf. This is noticeable even in women's struggles which the left marginalises as if it were a minority issue.

Sometimes laws are more harmful than the offences they legislate against. No law is worth passing, even those which are socially beneficial on the surface, since they are sure to be interpreted wrongly and are often used to bolster the private opinion of judges who carry them out. The old British custom of sentencing poorer classes to death for minor thefts above a small pecuniary value was not abolished by Parliament nor by the judges, but by the final refusal of juries to admit when forced to a guilty verdict that the goods were above that value.

The Anarchists can, as individuals or in groups, press for reforms but as Anarchists they seek to change minds and attitudes not to pass laws. When minds are changed, laws become obsolete and sooner or later law enforcers are unable to operate them. Prohibition in America and the Poll Tax in Britain are instances of this in action. At that point the law has to adapt itself to public opinion.

The Witchcraft Act remained on the statute books until some 40 years ago and it was enforced right up to the time of its abolition though the Public Prosecutor only dared to use a few of its clauses for fear of ridicule. It was abolished for political reasons but the equally ridiculous Blasphemy Act was retained, being unquestioned by Parliament until agitation by Muslims suggesting that it was clearly unfair that one could be fined for offending Christianity while one could not be executed for offending Islam.

The '1381' law was useful for squatters to persuade people they could occupy neglected buildings without offence, the odd thing being that the law did not exist. The myth was enough provided people believed in it.

One has to carry on a resistance to any and every form of tyranny. When governments feel their privileges are threatened, they drop the pretence of democracy and benevolence which most politicians prefer and Anarchists are forced to become what politicians describe them as: 'agents of disorder' though there is a lot more to Anarchism than that, and all 'agents of disorder' are not necessarily Anarchists.

A Marxist-Leninist would say, "Anarchists are able to bring about disorder but cannot seize power. Hence they are unable to take advantage of the situations they create, and the bourgeoisie, regrouping its strength, turns to fascism".

A Tory would say that Marxist-Leninists are Anarchists "because they wish to create Anarchy to create the conditions in which they would seize power". Both are absurdities. Anarchists can, of course, "seize power" no less than anyone just as a teetotaler can get blind drunk, but they would hardly continue to merit the name. Anarchists in power would not necessarily be any better or worse than anyone else, and they might even be as bad as communists or fascists. There is no limit of degradation to which power cannot bring anyone even with the loftiest principles. We would hope that being unprepared for power, they would be ineffective. Their task is not to "seize power" (those who use this term show that they seek personal power for themselves) but to abolish the bases of power. Power to all means power to nobody in particular.

If one leaves the wild beast of state power partially wounded it becomes more ferocious than ever, a raging wild beast that will destroy or be destroyed. This is why Anarchists form organisations to bring about revolutionary change. The nature of Anarchism as an individualistic creed in the true sense has often caused many to say such organisations might well be left to 'spontaneity', 'voluntary will' and so on - in other words, there can be no organisation (except for propaganda only) until the entire community forms its own organisations. This is a recipe for a sort of armchair Anarchism which never gets off the ground, but at the same time, with a point that cannot be ignored - until the whole community has control of its own organisations, such bodies cannot and should not take over the social and economic means of life.

It is shown by events that unity of resistance is needed against repression, that there must be united forms of action. Even when workers' councils are formed, there may be representatives on them from political factions, united outside on party lines and able to put forward a united front within such councils and thus to dominate and ultimately destroy them. That is why we need an organised movement to destroy such efforts at totalitarianism. In some cases one may need the ultimate sanction of acts of individual terrorism to be used against leadership from within, quite as much as that imposed from above. This form of specific terrorism has nothing in common with nationalist terrorism, which by its nature is as indiscriminate as State terrorism, for all that it is judged in a far harsher light. Anarchist terrorism is against individual despots, ruling or endeavouring to rule. Nationalist terrorism is a form of war against peoples. State terrorism is the abuse of power.

How will a Revolution come about?

We do not know. When a revolutionary situation presents itself - as it did with the occupation of factories in France 1936 and 1968; as it did in Spain 1936 with the fascist uprising; or with the breakdown of the Russian Armies 1917; or in many other times and places; we are ready for it or we are not (and usually not!!). Many times the workers are partially ready and leave the "wounded wild animal" of Statism fiercer than ever. It may be a purely individual action that sets off the spark. But only if, at that period, there is a conscious movement towards a free society that throws off the shackles of the past, will that situation become a social revolution.

The problem today that faces us is that half the world is prepared to rise almost at any opportune time, but has no military power to resist repression, and no industrial muscle to sustain itself. The other half of the world has such might, but no real desire to rise, being either bought off by capitalism or succumbing to persuasion.

BRINGING ABOUT THE NEW SOCIETY

What constitutes an Authoritarian Society?

Exploitation - Manipulation - Suppression. The organs of repression consist of many arms of the State.

The Apparatus of Government: The legislature, the judicature, the monarchy, the Civil Service, the Armed Forces, the Police etc.

The Apparatus of Persuasion: The educational system, the media, including TV, radio and the press, the Church, and even forms of apparent dissent that in reality condition us to accept the present system (the parliamentary Opposition is the most obvious, but many other alternatives to the accepted system too, e.g. revolution presented as merely one in lifestyle or musical preference, academic teaching of Marxist-Leninism etc.)

The Apparatus of Exploitation: The monetary system, financial control, the Banks, the Stock Exchange, individual, collective and State employers, land ownership. Under capitalism there is no escaping all of this.

Most political reformers have some part of the unfree system they wish to abolish. Republicans would abolish the Monarchy; Secularists would abolish or disestablish the Church; Socialists would, or used to want to, abolish the apparatus of exploitation; Pacifists would abolish the Army. Anarchism is unique in wishing to abolish all. The only true definition of an

28 Anarchist is one who believes it is desirable to abolish all; who believes it possible to abolish all, the sooner the better; and who works to bring such abolition about.

There are many, usually on the left, who think it desirable but impossible, many on the right who think it only too probable but undesirable. Others may be sympathetic to Anarchism as both desirable and possible but refrain from action in its favour. To borrow a phrase from another part of the forest they may be fellow-travellers of Anarchism.

The police are the cornerstone of the State (though sometimes, in extreme cases, the Government of the day needs to use the armed forces in lieu of or in addition to the police - in some countries this has led to replacement or control of the government by the army so long as the officers are tightly in control).

Only Anarchism believes in abolition of the police and this is the most hotly-disputed argument of Anarchism. Yet the police force as we know it is a comparatively modern phenomenon, fiercely resisted when introduced for reasons which have since been proved up to the hilt including the ability of the police to introduce or bolster up a dictatorship known indeed, as a police state. Without control of the police, debates at Westminster become as sterile of result as debates in the West Kensington Debating Society (and probably less interesting).

With German money, supplied by Helphand-Parvus, Lenin was able to return to Russia and pay Lettish mercenaries to act as police. He was the only politician in a position to do so and in this way Bolshevik success was achieved. The Nazis in their turn created murder gangs that roamed the streets, which were tacitly tolerated by the Republican police, but Nazi victory came when they controlled the police by legal means.

Can One Do Without the State?

There was an old superstition that if the Church excommunicated a country, it was under a terrible disaster. One could not be married, buried, leave property, do business in safety, be educated, be tended whilst sick, in a country that was excommunicated. The superstition was not an idle one, so long as people believed in the Church. If the country was banned from the communion of believers, the hospitals (run by the Church) were closed, there could be no trust in business (the clerics administered oaths and without them no promises need be kept), no education (they ran the schools), children could indeed be begotten (no way of preventing that by the Church!) but not christened and were therefore barred from the community of believers and under a threat, as they thought, of eternal damnation, while unmarried parents could not leave property to their "illegitimate" children. The physical reality of Hell was not necessary to make excommunication effective.

We are wiser now. But one superstition has been replaced by another. It has been transferred to belief in the State. If we were to reject government there would be no education (for government, national or local controls the schools - with obvious exceptions), no hospitals (ditto), nobody could carry on working because the government regulates workplace conduct, and so on. The truth all the time has been that not the Church and not the State but we the People have worked for everything we've got, and if we have not done so they have not provided for us. Even the privileged have been maintained by us not them.

Whenever Anarchists attack present-day society, they touch on the fears and prejudices of average people who know that society is a jungle today and cannot visualise life without the safeguards needed in the jungle. When they hear of Anarchism they bring forward objections which are, in fact, criticisms of the present system rather than criticisms of the free society of the future.

They fear what is known in the Statist language as a "state of Anarchy" - they think murder, rape, robbery, violent attack would ensue if there were no government to prevent it. And yet we all know that government cannot, certainly does not, prevent these evils. One has only to pick up the papers to learn that they flourish though government is strong, and also where government is weak, and more so perhaps where there are numerous bodies competing as to which is the real government and where government is said to have broken down. A "state of Anarchy" nowhere exists - in the sense of a society where there is no government and not just a weak or divided government.

The most a functioning government can do is not prevent but punish - when it finds out, sometimes wrongly or not at all - who the culprits are. Its own methods of repressive action can cause far more damage than the original crimes - the "cure" is worse than the disease.

"What would you do without a police force?" Anarchists are always asked. Society would never tolerate murder, whether it had a police force or not. The institutionalisation of a body to look after crime means that it not only "looks after" and nourishes crime, but that the rest of society is absolved from doing so. The reasoning is that a murder next door is the State's business, not mine! Responsibility for one's neighbour is reduced in an authoritarian society, in which the State is solely responsible for our behaviour.

"Who will do the dirty work?". This is a question society, not just the apologist for Anarchism, has to ask itself. There are dirty jobs which are socially unacceptable and poorly paid, so that nobody wants to do them. People have therefore been enslaved to do them, or there is competition in a market economy and the jobs become better paid (and therefore socially acceptable), or there is conscription for such jobs, whether by political direction or the pressures of unemployment.

Sometimes the capitalist introduces immigration in the hope of cheap labour, thus putting off the problem for a generation or two. Or it can be the jobs don't get done and, say, the streets aren't swept any more and so we get deluged with water shooting out from cars driven by graduate psychologists and step gingerly past refuse, clutching our theses on sociological impulses.

What the State does in such circumstances seems to depend on political factors. What an Anarchist society would do could only be foretold by a clairvoyant. It is plain what it could not do - use force, since it would lack repressive machinery or the means of economic coercion. Again we must look back to History. Barcelona 1936, Hungary 1956, countless other less documented sources where people have taken control of their lives into their own hands.

"If the Anarchists do not seize power, and have superseded other forms of socialism, that would, they objectively make way for fascism". This allegation presupposes the dilution of Anarchism with pacifism, for there is always, in any circumstances, one sure way of avoiding dictatorship, whether from the right, left, centre or within one's own ranks, and that is by personal removal of the dictator. This only becomes a symbolic gesture when the dictator is in power with all the machinery of command-and-obey at the disposal of the head of State.

Anyone will seize power if given the opportunity. Anarchists do not claim to be a privileged elite and cannot truthfully assert they would be better able to resist the temptations of power, or to wield it more successfully, than anyone else.

Leadership

Do Anarchists believe in leadership? They always deny they do, but undoubtedly many Anarchists have emerged as leaders, sometimes even of armies (like Buenaventura Durruti, Cipriano Mera and Nestor Makhno) or of ideas, or of organisations. In any grouping some people do naturally "give a lead", but this should not mean they are a class apart. What they always reject is institutionalised leadership. That means their supporters become blind followers and the leadership not one of example or originality but of unthinking acceptance.

Musical geniuses, artists, scientists can be of an "elite" without being elitist - there is no reason why excelling in certain spheres should make one better entitled to the world's goods or more worthy of consideration in matters in which one does not have specialised knowledge (the correspondence between Freud and Einstein in which they discuss whether war can be prevented is a classic example of futility - Einstein looking to Freud for a psychological lead in pacifism and Freud explaining it is in the nature of Man. In the end scientists who were pacifists or believers in the League of Nations or, like Einstein both, invented the atom bomb).

In the same way, people can work in an office without being bureaucrats: a bureaucrat is a person whose power is derived from the office they hold. In slang it is a term flung at anyone who happens to be efficient, which is far from being the same thing.

In the same way no real Anarchist, as distinct from someone pretending to be one, would agree to be part of an *institutionalised leadership*. Neither would an Anarchist wait for a lead, but give one. That is the mark of being an Anarchist, not a formal declaration of being one. What above all is the curse of leadership is not the leaders themselves, but agreement to being led blindly - not the faults of the shepherd but the meekness of the sheep. What would the crimes of Hitler have amounted to, had he had to carry them out by himself?

Can Public Opinion Itself be Authoritarian?

Yes. Even in a free society? Certainly. But this is not an argument against a free society, it is a reason why public opinion should not be moulded by an outside force. There might well be a society controlled economically by the workers where prejudice against some minorities, or traditional family attitudes, or rules laid down by religions rooted in the past, might still exist. The society would be free in one respect only, economically.

But without any means of codifying prejudices, no repressive machinery against nonconformists, above all no means of repression by persuasion when the media is controlled from above, public opinion can become superior to its prejudices. The majority is not automatically right. The manipulation of the idea of a majority is part of the government technique.

It is certainly the curse of the present day that pseudo-Anarchists, whether liberal or "lifestylist" create their own ghettos within a left, which has become itself a ghetto, in which acceptance of a package deal of ideas is obligatory. This endemic isolation, in the name of youth, sex, race, nationality, alternative culture, punk or whatever, has nothing to do with Anarchism though it has been wished on it by journalistic propaganda and encouraged by those who mistake packaging for practical substance. Anarchism is not a form of dress or a liking for a certain type of music. It is not the discussion of ideas in the pub or other social setting. Neither is it, necessarily, membership of some or other Anarchist group. It is practical activity which in whatever small way helps to increase mutual aid, destroy capitalism and bring about libertarian communism. It is activity that opens out, rather than closes down into the dead end of political elitism. As for libertarian communism ..well.. as Isaac Puente wrote, "Libertarian Communism will be like learning to live".

Anarchism is ...



- absence of a ruler and government by the people
- a form of voluntary socialism
- for equal freedom applicable to every human being
- against violence and aggression by the state or citizens
- for voluntary taxation
- against rent for land, instead occupancy should determine sole title to land
- against patents and copyrights; allows for all people to have access to all information
- against killing or doing injury to another intentionally or as an obvious bi-product of intentions (part of the reason for being anti-government)
- against interest on money for profit
- the belief that the state is most often the cause of violence and brutality in an area
- opposed to government, but not opposed to order or structure in a society
- against power in the hands of the few
- for eradicating all forms of domination including patriarchy, racism, and homophobia
- a yearning to be free from imposed constraints in order to live more fully
- a lifelong commitment to justice

Interview with John Zerzan

Utne Reader - May 2001

Now that the mainstream media have discovered anarchism, there seems to be more and more confusion about what it means. How do you define it?

I would say anarchism is the attempt to eradicate all forms of domination. This includes not only such obvious forms as the nation-state, with its routine use of violence and the force of law, and the corporation, with its institutionalized irresponsibility, but also such internalized forms as patriarchy, racism, homophobia. Beyond that, anarchism is the attempt to look even into those parts of our everyday lives we accept as givens, as parts of the universe, to see how they, too, dominate us or facilitate our domination of others.

What's wrong with division of labor?

If your primary goal is mass production, nothing at all. It's central to our way of life. Each person performs as a tiny cog in this big machine. If, on the other hand, your primary goal is relative wholeness, egalitarianism, autonomy, or an intact world, there's quite a lot wrong with it.

I think that at base a person is not complete or free insofar as that person's life and the whole surrounding setup depend on his or her being just some aspect of a process, some fraction of it. A divided life mirrors the basic divisions in society and it all starts there.

Hierarchy and alienation start there, for example. I don't think anyone would deny the effective control that specialists and experts have in the contemporary world. And I don't think anyone would argue that control isn't increasing with ever-greater acceleration.

But humans are social animals. Isn't it necessary for us to rely on each other?

It's important to understand the difference between the interdependence of a functioning community and a form of dependence that comes from relying on others who have specialized skills you don't have. They now have power over you. Whether they are "benevolent" in using it is really beside the point.

In addition to direct control by those who have specialized skills, there is a lot of mystification of those skills. Part of the ideology of modern society is that without it, you'd be completely lost, you wouldn't know how to do the simplest thing. Well, humans have been feeding themselves for the past couple of million years, and doing it a lot more successfully and efficiently than we do now. The global food system is insane. It's amazingly inhumane and inefficient. We waste the world with pesticides, herbicides, the effects of fossil fuels to transport and store foods, and so on, and literally millions of people go their entire lives without

ever having enough to eat. But few things are simpler than growing or gathering your own food.

More broadly, what has progress meant in practice?

Progress has meant the looming specter of the complete dehumanization of the individual and the catastrophe of ecological collapse. I think there are fewer people who believe in progress now than ever, but probably there are still many who perceive it as inevitable. We're certainly conditioned on all sides to accept that, and we're held hostage to it.

If fewer people believe in progress, what has replaced it?

Inertia. This is it. Deal with it, or else get screwed. You don't hear so much now about the American Dream, or the glorious new tomorrow. Now it's a global race for the bottom as transnational corporations compete to see which can most exploit workers, most degrade the environment. That competition thing works on the personal level, too. If you don't plug into computers you won't get a job. That's progress.

Where does that leave us?

I'm optimistic, because never before has our whole lifestyle been revealed as much for what it is.

Now that we've seen it, what is there to do?

The first thing is to question it, to make certain that part of the discourse of society—if not all of it—deals with these life-and-death issues, instead of the avoidance and denial that characterizes so much of what passes for discourse. And I believe, once again, that this denial can't hold up much longer, because there's such a jarring contrast between reality and what is said about reality. Especially in this country, I would say.

Maybe, and this is the nightmare scenario, that contrast can go on forever. *The Unabomber Manifesto* posits that possibility: People could just be so conditioned that they won't even notice there's no natural world anymore, no freedom, no fulfillment, no nothing. You just take your Prozac every day, limp along dyspeptic and neurotic, and figure that's all there is.

So, how do you see the future playing out?

I was talking to a friend about it this afternoon, and he was giving reasons why there isn't going to be a good outcome, or even an opening toward a good outcome. I couldn't say he was wrong, but as I mentioned before, I'm kind of betting that the demonstrable impoverishment on every level goads people into the kind of questioning we're talking about, and toward mustering the will to confront it. Perhaps now we're in the dark before the dawn. I remember when [social critic Herbert] Marcuse wrote *One-Dimensional Man*. It came out in about 1964, and he was saying that humans are so manipulated in modern consumerist society that there really can be no hope for change. And then within a couple of years things got pretty interesting, people woke up from the '50s to create the movements of the '60s. I believe had he written this book a little later it would have been much more positive.

Perhaps the '60s helped shape my own optimism. I was at the almost perfect age. I was at Stanford in college, and then I moved to Haight Ashbury, and Berkeley was across the Bay. I got into some interesting situations just because I was in the right place at the right time. I agree with people who say the '60s didn't even scratch the surface,

but you have to admit there was something going on. And you could get a glimpse, a sense of possibility, a sense of hope, that if things kept going, there was a chance of us finding a different path.

We didn't, but I still carry that possibility, and it warms me, even though 30 years later things are frozen, and awful. Sometimes I'm amazed that younger people can do anything, or have any hope, because I'm not sure they've seen any challenge that has succeeded even partially.

What do you want from your work and your life?

I would like to see a face-to-face community, an intimate existence, where relations are not based on power, and thus not on division of labor. I would like to see an intact natural world and I would like to live as a fully human being. I would like that for the people around me.

Once again, how do we get there from here?

I have no idea. It might be something as simple as everybody just staying home from work. Fuck it. Withdraw your energy. The system can't last without us. It needs to suck our energy. If people stop responding to the system, it's doomed.

But if we stop responding, if we really decide not to go along, aren't we doomed also, because the system will destroy us?

Right. It's not so easy. If it were that simple, people would just stay home, because it's such a drag to go through these miserable routines in an increasingly empty culture. But a question we always have to keep in mind is this: We're doomed, but in which way are we more doomed? I recently gave a talk at the University of Oregon in which I spoke on a lot of these topics. Near the end I said, "I know that a call for this sort of overturning of the system sounds ridiculous, but the only thing I can think of that's even more ridiculous is to just let the system keep on going."

How do we know that all the alienation we see around us will lead to breakdown and rejuvenation? Why can't it just lead to more alienation?

It's a question of how reversible the damage is. Sometimes—and I don't believe this is too much avoidance or denial—sometimes in history things are reversed in a moment when the physical world intrudes enough to knock us off balance. [Raoul] Vaneigem refers to a lovely little thing that gives me tremendous hope. The dogs in Pavlov's laboratory had been conditioned for hundreds of hours. They were fully trained and domesticated. Then there was a flood in the basement. And you know what happened? They forgot all of their training in the blink of an eye. We should be able to do at least that well. I am staking my life on it, and it is toward this end that I devote my work.

"To be governed is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so."

—Pierre-Joseph Proudhon