



To be GOVERNED is to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so. To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction noted, registered, counted, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, prevented, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished.

It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be place[d] under contribution, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, harassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, derided, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality.

-Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (“What Is Government?”, General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century)

Prepared by the
University of Oklahoma Students for a Stateless Society
for the
Center for a Stateless Society
c4ss.org

An Invitation to Anarchism



From the
Students for a Stateless Society

Recommended Reading

The Conscience of an Anarchist: Why It's Time to Say Good-Bye to the State and Build a Free Society (Gary Chartier, 2011)

Anarchy and the Law: The Political Economy of Choice (Edward Stringham, 2007)

The Enterprise of Law: Justice Without the State (Bruce Benson, 2011)

Studies in Mutualist Political Economy (Kevin A. Carson, 2007)

The Machinery of Freedom (David Friedman, 1989)

For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto (Murray Rothbard 1973)

Black Flags and Windmills: Hope, Anarchy, and the Common Ground Collective (Scott Crow, 2011)

From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services (David Beito, 1999)

The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916 (Gabriel Kolko, 1977)

Markets Not Capitalism: Individualist Anarchism Against Bosses, Inequality, Corporate Power, and Structural Poverty (Chartier & Johnson, 2011)

Anarchy and Legal Order: Law and Politics for a Stateless Society (Chartier, 2012)

Organization Theory: A Libertarian Perspective (Kevin A. Carson, 2008)

For more information, visit www.c4ss.org

An Invitation to Anarchism

by Jason Lee Byas

The word “anarchist” is thrown around a lot these days. When discussing their mild disagreements over foreign policy, healthcare, tax rates, gun control, immigration, torture, or the war on drugs, it’s not uncommon for a Republican or Democrat to hurl the word at each other. In the name of civility, it’s time for someone to put an end to these baseless insults.

It’s time for anarchists to speak for themselves.

The Students for a Stateless Society aims to do just that. Affiliated with the Center for a Stateless Society, we were formed to bring together a diverse group of anarchist students and further common goals. Out of those goals we share, the primary one is a desire and demand for the immediate abolition of the State and other authoritarian social relationships moreover. We do not want to “take over” the government,* but to end it altogether. Those functions it performs now that are worth doing, we propose to be performed by free people acting in free association.

Of course, telling you what we don’t believe in (the State, aggression, and domination) isn’t very informative, so it’s worth getting at a few of the things we do believe in that require us to reject the State and embrace anarchy.

We believe in **law and order**. We believe in **peaceful cooperation**. We believe in **realistic, workable organizational structures**. And we believe in **moral responsibility**.

* Words like “the State,” and “government,” will be used here to refer specifically to any organization which maintains a territorial monopoly on legitimizing violence and giving the last word on legal matters, typically collecting its funds through taxation and enforcing its rulings through a police force.

Law & Order

A serious commitment to the rule of law requires a serious commitment to anarchy. This is because the State's very nature—an enforced monopoly on the provision of legal and defense services, or at least on the “final authority” of either—is in stark contradiction to impartiality, the principle that no one can be the judge of their own case. All suits brought against the government are judged by the same institution: the government. And if it ever actually rules against itself, it also has the job of enforcing that ruling.

This point might seem tenuous at first, but consider how it's shaped the world around us. Whenever a police officer assaults an innocent person, they're typically not even fired (let alone given the same punishment we would get). They're usually given paid leave. There are good reasons why many people, especially in disadvantaged communities, view the State's police force not as protectors, but as occupiers.

While the government ruling over us in America has its own attempt at a system of internal checks and balances, these are not real checks and balances. Surely there are some things that the government does that you think are obviously unconstitutional. Yet bringing attention to their unconstitutionality will most of the time get you nowhere, as long as you can only appeal to the same institution that ruled it constitutional. This was the point behind Jefferson and other early Americans' insistence on “the right of revolution”—a final check on State power when worst comes to worst.

But revolutions are typically bloody, chaotic, difficult to get going, and many times install rulers much worse than the last. If there were some way to both “watch the watchmen” and not live in perpetual fear of civil war, that would be clearly preferable. Luckily for us, such an alternative is possible, and has been outlined by countless anarchist theorists.

Conclusion

So that is who we are, and why we believe what we believe. We are enemies of the State, and against power. Which means we oppose lawlessness, chaos, aggression, domination, utopianism, pseudo-scientific social planning, moral abdication, and apathy. We are human beings demanding total freedom, and are we are anarchists. Which means we are the true defenders of law and order, peaceful cooperation, realistic organizational structures, and moral responsibility.

We have identified that choice which must be made. Embrace anarchy, or allow countless human lives to be made nasty, brutish, and short by the governments of the world.

Rapid social progress through decentralized, freed markets, or stagnation through monopoly and countless resources wasted on literal murder. Individuals flourishing together through mutual aid or racist cops beating the oppressed senseless without ever having to pay restitution. Total freedom or subtle serfdom. We have chosen the former. Whether or not you join us is your call.

In our State-distorted world, the average person's reaction to social problems is always to give money to some campaign, go door to door for candidates, or worse, vote. This absolves them of responsibility and makes them feel like they've done something. Instead of letting that burst of energy get mangled by the garbage disposal of electoral politics and petitions, we demand that it goes into productive use through serious social action. For instance, as long as we have a State, we don't want to have to wait for the police chief or Sheriff to change whenever something needs to be done about police corruption. We want to start grassroots campaigns to educate the public on what to do when police hassle them, and protect and serve each other with cop-watching programs like the Peaceful Streets Project in Austin.

After eliminating power, and that centralized civil war that we call the State, it will be more clear that real human interests are in harmony. The fact that real social cooperation and mutual aid has nothing to do with sacrifice, and everything to do with our self-actualization as social animals, will be much more obvious. Only when people are completely free as individuals will they be able to build the strongest social bonds. Only when people are allowed to freely and organically build those social bonds through voluntary interaction, rather than relating to each other by means of command and control, will they be able to be complete as individuals.

Anarchist economists and philosophers of law have written extensively on the idea of polycentric law and market legal institutions. The idea is essentially that one freely chooses their own method of personal security (be that a cooperative protection association, a defense agency, or whatever way one chooses). In instances of conflict that can't be otherwise mediated, cases are brought before arbitration firms, private courts that serve as neutral third parties, and the conflicting parties agree beforehand to abide by their decision.

If someone doesn't approve of a particular court's decisions, they can take their business elsewhere. If what someone wants out of a court, though, is something that no one else is likely to want (e.g., allowing murder, assault, etc.), they're extremely unlikely to find that sort of thing.

The options people would have when they need legal or security services would no longer be seen as invaders or occupiers, but freely chosen protectors of rights. Also, as will be discussed later, the fact that people must actually bear the costs of what it takes to protect themselves and their property would be a great socially equalizing force.

Peaceful Cooperation

The centralized State is the greatest perpetrator of unjust violence and disorder in the world today, so those who value peaceful cooperation must also push for anarchy. As a general rule, people intuitively tend to believe that force is only justified in defense or when acquiring restitution. If they applied this intuition consistently, they would find that they're ethically compelled to oppose all States, everywhere, at all times. This is because States typically subsist through taxation, collecting funds forcibly from innocent people. Even if a State were to somehow function without taxation, it must use force to maintain its monopoly on legal and security services, or cease to be a State in any meaningful sense of the term.

While taxation and enforced monopoly are already unethical in themselves, they're even worse instrumentally. Just look where the money goes. Innocent men, women, and children, are gunned down, blown apart, burned alive, or otherwise murdered through the military activity of the United States and other governments, written off as "collateral damage." Those who witnessed their loved ones die at the hands of a State's military operations are then more likely to hate the State responsible, and commit acts of unjustifiable terror against other, equally innocent people.

Ending this cycle of terror should be the number one moral priority for anyone who values human life or peaceful cooperation. And as long as there are huge, centralized nation-states, power-hungry and jealous, the threat of war will always loom over us.

One of the beautiful things about our present world is that despite being imprisoned by States and other aggressors, we're able to accomplish powerful things when some semblance of peaceful social cooperation and voluntary exchange leaks through. Of course, even that is radically distorted by the violent world it takes place in, but it's given us a lot to be thankful for and made the human condition much easier than it used to be. We're able to band together with our friends and families, and, through trade, even mutually benefit with strangers.

Our ability to do so, though, is severely hampered by the States that rule over us. Immigration restrictions destroy our ability to pursue our dreams and seek better employment. They also split up families, foster racism, and create a permanent underclass of people living in constant fear. All because of those arbitrary lines drawn up by States called "borders."

Not only does the State commit and inspire massive aggression, it also enables it. Consider the environment. Rather than forcing polluters to pay full restitution to those whose property they damage, we have regulatory agencies that just set checklists of basic precautions, and as long as those were fulfilled, absolve the destroyers of the Earth of their sins.

Long before the time of anyone likely to be reading this, there existed mutual aid societies. Mutual aid societies provided a social safety net and healthcare services for the poor without the inefficiency, rigid bureaucracy, or dehumanizing paternalism toward recipients associated with the modern welfare state. Before licensure laws killed the practice of doctors entering into contracts with mutual aid societies, a day's wages would pay for a year of medical care. (Yes, you read that right.)

Though we expect hierarchical businesses to be the least efficient in a stateless economy, and that they'll likely crumble to leave a market filled with alternative models, we're also planning on speeding that process along. Since the beginnings of anarchism, it's been associated with radical labor movements of the kind that bosses most feared. The old "wildcat" methods most associated with those more radical labor unions are the ones that ended up getting banned. It seems reasonable to suggest that part of that might have something to do with the fact that they're also the more effective ones.*

Not only are our social goals more likely to be fulfilled through free association, the idea of responsibility presupposes the need for freedom. Falling in line to follow orders represents a willful decision to give up the sort of practical reasoning that ethics requires. Giving those orders, and having other people do your bidding removes the personal engagement with the world necessary for a good life. Morality necessitates anarchy.

This doesn't just mean eliminating the State, either. It means eliminating all sorts of intersecting patterns of domination and control throughout our society. Racism, sexism, homophobia, and the authoritarian structure of the modern workplace, all have to go. And getting rid of the State makes getting rid of them a lot easier. As we've seen, any pre-existing system of power and privilege will be re-entrenched as long as there's a State. Furthermore, in the absence of a State, people are forced to directly engage their communities and confront their own deep-seeded prejudices.

* The many ways in which unions would be freer to keep their bosses on their toes in a stateless world can be found in the old Industrial Workers of the World pamphlet, *How to Fire Your Boss*.

Moral Responsibility

Anyone who desires a world where people are socially and personally responsible must also be an anarchist. For the State always represents some degree of collective nihilism and moral abdication.

Though we believe in the power of spontaneous order* to build society, we also recognize that spontaneous order is the product of actions taken by individuals, who have the responsibility to act whenever they see problems.

Some of you who are still reading might still be wondering, “Who will build the roads? Who will take out the garbage? Who will care for the less fortunate? Who will make sure businesses don’t set unfair working conditions? Who will teach the children? Who will clean up after natural disasters?” The answer is the same in each of those cases. “We will.” Hopefully, you’ll be there to help us.

You might wonder how we’re so sure that those things could be done in a free society, just through people working together. That question looks strange, though, when you consider that whatever the State does, it does through people working together. It doesn’t have some magical machine with the power to do that which groups of normal human beings can’t. Not only that, but as we’ve seen, it does whatever it does in a way that is both radically inefficient and radically regressive. It’s a wonder that anything worth doing is even done at all!

Meanwhile, when allowed—or even when explicitly disallowed—people interacting freely have found alternatives to the State to solve pressing problems. After Hurricane Katrina, the anarchist-inspired Common Ground Collective provided for those in need of emergency care in ways the State or even giant top-down charities couldn’t.

* Spontaneous order is the process by which elaborate, complex systems are built without any intentional plan (e.g., language). It is often said to refer to things that are “the products of human action, but not of human design.”

Your tax dollars do go to a lot of things worth supporting, like education, transportation, libraries, etc. But wouldn’t you rather be able to pay for those things without also having to pay for mass-murder, police brutality, environmental destruction, and splitting up families through widespread incarceration? And wouldn’t you rather be able to pay for them with the knowledge that you have other options—not only that there are alternatives to go to, but that if you use one of those alternatives instead, no one will use violence against you?

Realistic Organizational Structures

Anyone who wants a reasonable, practical way to organize society, and who has no time for hopeless, utopian dreaming, must be an anarchist. This is because any attempt to impose order from above suffers from the fatal conceit that it can grasp all the rapidly changing and dispersed tacit knowledge of society.

This is a large part of why the old Soviet Bloc states of Eastern Europe fell. It’s also why the more divorced from the actual work being done that your boss is, the more likely their orders are to be inane and completely irrelevant to the tasks at hand.

You don’t have to have a doctorate in economics to know this, either. Just think about every interaction you’ve ever had with a top-heavy bureaucracy at work, school, or anywhere else. The procedures in place meant to streamline whatever you’re trying to do end up making it nearly impossible. The fact that there even exists a labor strike tactic called “rule-book slowdowns,” in which production is slowed down by following orders, shows that large-scale organizations tend to set stupid rules. The efficiency of many businesses absolutely requires that workers who actually know what the job entails ignore the protocols of their clueless bosses.

Furthermore, an authoritarian work relationship significantly clogs the upward flow of information. You can’t just tell your boss that some rule they or their boss (or their boss’s boss, etc.) came up with is stupid.

Shooting the messenger is completely ubiquitous in our corporate world. Whatever crucial suggestions about how to change things that you give your boss, you will regret, and they will resent.

So why don't all these corporate behemoths completely collapse tomorrow, if they're so inherently inefficient? Because they ride on the backs of our leviathan government. We don't just mean obvious things like direct bailouts, out in the open subsidies, and things of that sort. Those are a part of the story, but so are things that everyone takes for granted.

Take roads, for example. Roads can be (and have been) built without being produced by the State. One way that this has happened in the past is that those businesses who actually needed them the most (so that customers could reach them, or so that they could transport goods) would often pay for one to be built and then donate it to the community. Because businesses require transportation to conduct trade, and larger businesses require more of it, they inevitably use roads more than any individual. Yet all of us pay for them to free-ride (literally, in this instance), making the costs of big business artificially cheap. The fact that the car economy might not be the most environmentally sustainable (or the most economically efficient) way to get around is also never questioned, because State production of roads gives it a very strong artificial advantage over other methods of transportation.

This is the case with all centralized government production. Different people need different goods, different amounts of goods, and different qualities of goods. No one person or group of persons has, or could even hypothetically have, all the information necessary to calculate a distribution and use of resources that would satisfy people's wants. Markets can do this automatically, through the price system.

One obvious example of this difference in practice is shown in the iconic image of Soviet bread lines. But what holds for bread holds for transportation, education, and even the services associated with law and security. No one knows how much of those things need to be produced, nor even what form they should take.

The transportation equivalent of breadlines is our dilapidated highway system, which towers over us like a string of lifeless monuments to the State's structural ignorance. For education, it's a school system that does a good job of treating students like prisoners but a horrible one of helping them learn anything. In law and security, it becomes the police, who devote more time to hunting down peaceful drug users than seeking justice.

In addition to being wasteful, monopoly always re-entrenches power. In the Soviet Union, Communist Party higher-ups could always be sure to get bread no matter how bad shortages got. In the United States, wealthier areas have disproportionately better schools than poorer ones, and the dominant culture's narratives are the ones drilled into students. We already mentioned how this applies to transportation.

That monopoly secures power is most evident in the provision of law and security. When the poor call the police for help in certain neighborhoods, nothing happens. When anything at all happens to those with sufficient wealth and privilege, they come out in droves, ready to act as personal armies. Yet both groups pay—and must pay—into that same “service.”

Imagine if those who had no interest in defending, say, a billionaire's giant multiple-county-sized land holdings were no longer forced to do so. It would only be defended if the billionaire personally paid for all that protection themselves. Given how high the costs of defending such a land claim would be, this would at bare minimum serve as a powerful check on wealth inequality.

Even providing for the common defense, the most basic function of the most limited governments, has a regressive effect. The existence of the State means the existence of monopoly, which leads to massive inequalities in wealth and social power.