

necessary. Sometimes people grumble at us for being unwilling to invest energy in their favourite political party, who we might, at best, grudgingly regard as the slightly less bad managers of a failed system. We argue that parliamentary politics takes up a lot of time and effort that would be more effective if spent building movements and strengthening communities.

We don't seek power, because, while it might seem tempting to take power to leverage change, those in power always become conservative. When you've gained wealth, privilege and the ego boost that comes of occupying a high position, you have a stake in maintaining that system, even when you know, deep down, that that system is failing people. We point to the past success of activists that built large-scale movements demanding social change, and note that most change comes when politicians are trying to catch up with these movements, not leading them. Scaring the bejeezus out of them helps facilitate change too.

Parliamentary politics at best seems to be going around in circles, at worst, it's the management of a slow slide downhill as even 'left' parties increasingly compromise with capitalism and the world burns. Somebody needs to be thinking about, and pushing for, a complete escape.

Anarchists come in all flavours, from thoughtful and reasonable people (like me), to stodgy academics and ditzzy noodleheads. At least as far back as the impressionists, anarchists have been significant in art movements, not only for the free wine at exhibition openings. Quite a number of famous writers – Leo Tolstoy, Ursula LeGuin, Aldous Huxley and others – have been anarchists. Novels and poetry have been important vehicles for the spread of anarchist ideas at times.

Anarchism in ten minutes

This is a very short introduction to the thing we call 'anarchism', a word applied to a political theory, a way of making decisions and a movement.

Anarchism says people are happiest when they aren't being forced or pressured to do things. There is much debate as to what constitutes anarchism. Anarchism is in a constant state of change as new circumstances arise and new thoughts occur to us. One anarchist said the term 'anarchist' does not have a fixed meaning – it's just what we call those people who are pushing for the greatest amount of freedom and democracy in society in any place and time.

We think people can successfully organise their own communities, without governments or businesses, and those communities can work with other communities to support and help each other.

Anarchism is mostly just a way of making decisions – a democratic process where nobody gets to dominate decision-making, and if a decision has stronger impacts on particular groups of people – then those peoples' right to a louder voice is recognised.

All political ideologies are authoritarian as they state what people must do. Anarchism doesn't. It sees the autonomy of groups of people and their self-determination as paramount.

Some see anarchism as a European idea stemming from the writings of people such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman and Peter Kropotkin. Others take the view that this is only one strand of anarchism, with many traditional societies around the world, notably in Africa, Southeast Asia and Central America being effectively anarchist – they just don't always use the European word. In many

places western ideas about anarchism have fused with local traditions. There are Christian, Buddhist and muslim anarchists, and most countries have had an anarchist movement at some point in their history.

We don't have a lot of theory, we think the best political ideas come from thinking about your own political and social experiences. What just happened? Why did that happen? And if it was a good experience, how could we make that situation better and more frequent? Or, if it was a bad experience, how could we stop it happening, or make it happen less often?

How it might work

Anarchists think the best way to organise society is as a network of democratic communities that control the resources the community needs to feed and house itself, and meet other needs (sometimes referred to as 'the means of production'). That doesn't mean every community needs to be entirely self-sufficient. They might trade with other communities, or just support each other in ways that we refer to as 'mutual aid' – our community helps another in whatever way it can, and they do the same for us. For example, we might give them food and they might help us build houses. This is how human society worked for most of our existence as a species – until some gangsters decided they were entitled to be in charge, and declared themselves 'kings' or 'governments'.

People are happy to work when they can choose what they want to do and how to do it. Some things just have to be done, of course. Fruit has to be picked when it's ripe, kids need lunch at lunchtime. But people have always done these essential tasks without needing a boss to tell them to do it, or laws to force them to do it, or being threatened with poverty if they don't work for wages. Generally, these tasks are best done

But sometimes it's true. Many anarchists see self-defence against racist policing, fascism and other state bullying as necessary, and we obviously can't rely on the state to protect us from itself. Historically, in Mexico, Ukraine, Syria, Korea, Spain and elsewhere, and in present day Kurdistan, anarchists have taken up arms to defend communities against dictatorships of many kinds.

Movements

Anarchists believe in building anarchism here and now, not waiting for a hypothetical revolution that will change everything. While we don't have the time and money to build as much as we'd like, anarchists try and create things that are both useful here and now, and can also be seen as models, and practice, for the future society – things such as community gardens and food co-ops, DIY art and music events and almost anything collectively run.

Many ideas that originated in anarchist movements have spread to other parts of society and no longer seem radical. Many are now taken for granted as 'normal'.

We accept that people must make compromises just to survive under capitalism – we don't condemn people for failing to live up to the ideals of anarchism here and now. Sometimes you just gotta make a buck, or buy cheap shit made by an exploited worker in China. For that, we should blame capitalism, not each other. Having said that, anarchists living in the present world who aren't causing some friction have probably forgotten how to be anarchists. Anarchists should be a nuisance to those in authority, and a help to those who are struggling.

And anarchists (mostly) see reformism – pushing for minor improvements in laws and other political decisions – as

workers capitalism needs, providing welfare for those who are sick or elderly, so not useful to capitalism, and to the unemployed, when they are surplus to current labour requirements. Back in the 1930s welfare was given to unemployed workers out of fear riots would turn into insurrection and widespread crime, a typical case of the state having to protect capitalism from its own stupidity. Left to itself, capitalism grinds everyone down until they rebel, then attacks them for rebelling.

The state will often provoke violence, turning a complex social problem into a 'law and order' issue which plays to its strengths. It's probably necessary to mention that we have little in common with the recently emerged conspiracy and 'sovereign citizen' types who have hijacked a lot of anarchist rhetoric. Some of these people are just privileged dickheads, others are people who have been abandoned by governments too timid to challenge capitalism, and have been misled as to the real causes of their problems. While very negative about wealthy elites, these movements include authoritarian, racist and fascist elements, and their aim amounts to little more than replacing those currently in power with themselves and their mates. Also we think the earth is a globe and Neil Armstrong did go to the moon.

From time to time, the media blames anarchists for riots, or violence at protests. Sometimes this is just propaganda – 'anarchist' is an easy label to apply to unidentified troublemakers. Compared to the state, which has well trained and armed police, armies and airforces, we aren't much good at violence. Anarchists have a general dislike of force, many are complete pacifists, and non-violent civil disobedience is a common anarchist practice.

collectively, as even an unpleasant job can be pleasurable when it's shared.

Contrary to what we are told, most things that actually need doing get done without people having to be ordered to do it. Every day unpaid people in our communities are carrying out housework, childcare, care of the sick and elderly, running marae, clubs and churches, volunteering on community and environmental projects, supporting people with mental health issues, helping out at schools and more. On the other hand, huge amounts of the work people get paid to do – writing advertising, staffing prisons, selling houses, speculating on the stock market and maintaining bureaucracy – doesn't improve society and often makes it worse.

It's often argued that we need the state to protect us. Anarchists point out that, in many times and places, the main threat to people is the state itself. Even under relatively benign regimes, the protection the state offers is ineffective and limited, and the state's priority is protecting economic inequality – which drives other forms of crime.

Of course, there will always be occasional anti-social behaviour even in the best adjusted society in which people are genuinely cared for and the fear of destitution is removed. But communities aren't helpless. They can find ways to rehabilitate and, if necessary, remove offenders, and restore the balance between the freedom to act and the impacts of those actions on others that should be the aim of any justice system.

Race, gender, class

Until the second half of the 20th century, anarchists, like other socialists, tended to see class as the most important form of oppression. Given that grinding poverty was destroying most people's enjoyment of their lives, this was kinda understandable.

Anarchists here and there did point to the specific oppression of women and the racism that stemmed from colonisation which a lot of socialists preferred to ignore. But too often these issues were treated as secondary. It also became more apparent that, without a degree of freedom, you could be materially rich, but still miserable.

In this country, activists began to move away from class-based analysis in the late 1960s and early 70s, as women, Maori and Pasifika struggled to get others to acknowledge specific oppression outside of class. By the 1980s, this analysis was broadly accepted, at least in radical circles. Academia eventually noticed it and dubbed it 'intersection-ality'. Further understandings of sexuality and gender added to the richness of leftist thinking.

Since the middle-class has come to dominate leftist thinking, the class aspect of intersectionality has been played down, which is a bit of a worry as it's still important, and becoming increasingly so as economic inequality increases.

The New Zealand establishment is built on institutionalised racism and sexism. Our law and parliament are based on British models, nearly all businesses follow European and US forms, here and there this is coated with a thin veneer of cultural appropriation in order to appear acceptable. Homophobia, transphobia, nationalism and racism are used to divide communities and keep them from addressing the domination of the powerful. Women are still paid less, own less, suffer more violence and carry most of the burden of unpaid work. Reforms to address these issues offered by those in charge are slow and weak.

Capitalism, colonisation and the state

Anarchists see the development of capitalism, and colonisation, as part of the same trend – a push by a small group of people to

control power and resources, rather than having them broadly distributed. Feudalism and enclosures took common land into private hands, colonisation spread this process globally. Neo-liberalism is the current version, where the resources and services provided by the state, which at least are under a slight amount of democratic control, are privatised and most of us have no say at all in how those resources are used.

Sometimes people say anarchism would work in a simpler society, but modern life is too complex to be organised without authority. From what we can see the state, and capitalism, are both terrible at dealing with complexity. Capitalism aims services and products at the wealthy, or sometimes the largest demographic, and leaves out everyone else. The state has a fondness for simple and brutal solutions – build a motorway, start a war or make something illegal.

This rhinocerosisation is a process that inevitably hurts the lives of many, wrecks the planet and encourages others to see progress in macho terms. The democratic, fuzzy and zig-zaggy development of human society which occurs naturally, and involves everyone, is seen as inefficient and weak.

Capitalism has always been buddies with the state. a 'free market' has never existed. Capitalism relied on the state to provide legal protection for its activities, such as the 'limited liability company' that allows capitalists to take profit without the risk of having to cover a company's debts. Much of the early development of capitalism relied on marketing addictive drugs – such as alcohol, opium and tobacco – and the outright theft of colonised people's land and wealth.

The state serves capitalism by providing it with contracts, subsidies, bail-outs and police protection. Often it also picks up the bill for repairing the environment, training the skilled