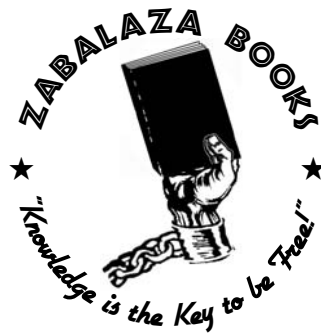


# Anarchism & Anarchy

**Errico  
Malatesta**



Post: Postnet Suite 47, Private Bag X1, Fordsburg,  
South Africa, 2033

E-Mail: [zababooks@zabalaza.net](mailto:zababooks@zabalaza.net)

Website: [www.zabalaza.net](http://www.zabalaza.net)

# Anarchism & Anarchy

Anarchism in its origins, its aspirations, and its methods of struggle, is not necessarily linked to any philosophical system. Anarchism was born of a moral revolt against social injustice. When men were to be found who felt as if suffocated by the social climate in which they were obliged to live; who felt the pain of others as if it were their own; who were also convinced that a large part of human suffering is not the inevitable consequence of inexorable natural or supernatural laws, but instead, stems from social realities dependent on human will and can be eliminated through human effort - the way was open that had to lead to anarchism.

The specific causes of social ills and the right means to destroy them had to be found. When some thought that the fundamental cause of the disease was the struggle between men which resulted in domination by the conquerors and the oppression and exploitation of the vanquished, and observed that the domination by the former and this subjection of the latter had given rise to capitalistic property and the State, and when they sought to overthrow both State and property - then it was that anarchism was born.<sup>1</sup>

I prefer to discount uncertain philosophy and stick to the common definitions which tell us that *Anarchy* is a form of social life in which men live as brothers, where nobody is in a position to oppress or exploit anyone else, and in which all the means to achieve maximum moral and material development are available to everyone; and Anarchism is the method by which to achieve anarchy through freedom and without government, that is without authoritarian organisms which, by using force, even, possibly for good ends, impose their will on others.<sup>2</sup>

Anarchy is *society organised without authority*, meaning by authority the power to *impose* one's own will and not the inevitable and beneficial fact that he who has greater understanding of, as well as ability to carry out, a task succeeds more easily in having his opinion accepted, and of acting as a guide on the particular question, for those less able than himself.

1. *Pensiero e Volontà*, May 16, 1925
2. *Pensiero e Volontà*, September 1, 1925
3. *l'Agitazione*, June 4, 1897
4. *Umanità Nova*, August 25, 1920
5. *Umanità Nova*, September 2, 1922
6. *Umanità Nova*, April 27, 1922
7. *Umanità Nova*, September 16, 1921
8. *Pensiero e Volontà*, May 15, 1924
9. *Pensiero e Volontà*, January 1, 1924
10. *Volontà*, June 15, 1913
11. *Pensiero e Volontà*, May 16, 1925
12. *Umanità Nova*, September 16, 1922
13. *Volontà*, June 15, 1913
14. *Umanità Nova*, April 27, 1922
15. *Il Risveglio*, December 20, 1922
16. *Umanità Nova*, July 25, 1920
17. *Il Programma Anarchico*, Bologna 1920
18. *Il Programma Anarchico*, Bologna 1920

In our opinion authority not only is not necessary for social organisation but, far from benefiting it, lives on it parasitically, hampers its development, and uses its advantages for the special benefit of a particular class which exploits and oppresses the others. So long as in a community there is harmony of interests, and no one has either the desire or the means to exploit his fellow beings, there is no trace of authority; when, instead, there are internal struggles and the community is divided into conquerors and conquered, then authority appears and is of course used for the advantage of the strongest and serves to confirm, perpetuate and strengthen their victory.

Because we think in this way, we are anarchists; were we to believe that organisation was not possible without authority we would be authoritarians, because we would still prefer authority, which fetters and impoverishes life, to disorganisation which makes life impossible.<sup>3</sup>

How often must we repeat that we do not wish to impose anything on anybody; that we do not believe it either possible or desirable to do good by the people through force, and that all we want is that no one should impose their will on us, that no one should be in a position to impose on others a form of social life which is not freely accepted.<sup>4</sup>

Socialism (and it is even more true of anarchism) cannot be imposed, both on moral grounds in regard to freedom, as well as because it is impossible to apply “willy nilly” a regime of justice for all. It cannot be imposed on a minority by a majority. Neither can it be imposed by a majority on one or more minorities.

And it is for this reason that we are anarchists, that is we want everybody to possess the “effective” freedom to live as they wish. This is not possible without expropriating the present holders of social wealth and placing the means of production at the disposal of everybody.<sup>5</sup>

The fundamental basis of the anarchist method is freedom, and we therefore combat, and will go on combating, all that which violates freedom (the equal freedom for all) whatever the dominant regime: monarchist, republican, or any other.<sup>6</sup>

We do not boast that we possess absolute truth; on the contrary, we believe that *social truth* is not a fixed quantity, good for all times, universally applicable, or determinable in advance, but that instead, once freedom has been secured, mankind will go forward discovering and acting gradual-

1. Abolition of private property in land, in raw materials and the instruments of labour, so that no one shall have the means of living by the exploitation of the labour of others, and that everybody, being assured of the means to produce and to live, shall be truly independent and in a position to unite freely among themselves for a common objective and according to their personal sympathies.

2. Abolition of government and of every power which makes the law and imposes it on others: therefore abolition of monarchies, republics, parliaments, armies, police forces, magistratures and any institution whatsoever endowed with coercive powers.

3. Organisation of social life by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers, created and modified according to the wishes of their members, guided by science and experience, and free from any kind of imposition which does not spring from natural needs, to which everyone, convinced by a feeling of overriding necessity, voluntarily submits.

4. The means of life, for development and well-being, will be guaranteed to children and all who are prevented from providing for themselves.

5. War on religions and all lies, even if they shelter under the cloak of science. Scientific instruction for all to advanced level.

6. War on rivalries and patriotic prejudices. Abolition of frontiers; brotherhood among all peoples.

7. Reconstruction of the family, as will emerge from the practice of love, freed from every legal tie, from every economic and physical oppression, from every religious prejudice.<sup>17</sup>

What we want, therefore, is the complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man; we want men united as brothers by a conscious and desired solidarity, all co-operating voluntarily for the well-being of all; we want society to be constituted for the purpose of supplying everybody with the means for achieving the maximum well-being, the maximum possible moral and spiritual development; we want bread, freedom, love and science - for everybody.<sup>18</sup>

dict any known law of nature to consider it possible and to struggle to win the support needed to achieve it.<sup>14</sup>

I am a communist (libertarian of course); I am for agreement and I believe that through an intelligent decentralisation, and a continuous exchange of ideas, it would be possible to arrive at the organisation of the necessary exchange of goods and satisfy the needs of all without having recourse to the money symbol, which is certainly fraught with problems and dangers. As every good communist does, I aspire to the abolition of money; and, as every good revolutionary, I believe that it will be necessary to strip the bourgeoisie, invalidating all the symbols of wealth that permit people to live without work.<sup>15</sup>

We often find ourselves saying: “anarchism is the abolition of the *gendarme*” meaning by *gendarme* any armed force, any material force in the service of a man or of a class, to oblige others to do what they would otherwise not do voluntarily. Of course, that definition does not give even an approximate idea of what is meant by anarchy, which is a society founded on free agreement, in which every individual can achieve the maximum development, material and moral, as well as intellectual; in which he finds in social solidarity the guarantee for his freedom and well-being. The removal of physical constriction is not enough in itself to ensure that he will acquire the dignity of a free man, or learn to love his fellow men and to respect in them those rights which he wants others to respect for him, and to refuse both to command as well as to be commanded. One can be a willing slave for reasons of moral deficiency and a lack of faith in oneself, just as one can be a tyrant through wickedness or a lack of conscience when one does not meet adequate resistance. But this is not to say that “the abolition of the *gendarme*”, that is the abolition of violence in social relations is not the basis, the indispensable condition without which anarchy could not flourish, and, indeed, could not be conceived.<sup>16</sup>

Since all the present ills of society have their origin in the struggle between men, in the seeking after well-being through one’s own efforts and for oneself and against everybody, we want to make amends, replacing hatred by love, competition by solidarity, the individual search for personal well-being by the fraternal co-operation for the well-being of all, oppression and imposition by liberty, the religious and pseudo-scientific lie by truth, therefore:

ly with the least number of upheavals and with a minimum of friction. Thus our solutions always leave the door open to different and, one hopes, better solutions.<sup>7</sup>

The factors of history are too numerous and too complex and human wills are so uncertain and indeterminable, that no one could seriously undertake to prophesy the future. But we do not want to harden our anarchism into dogma, nor impose it by force; it will be what it can be, and will develop, to the extent that men and institutions will become more favourable to integral freedom and justice. . .<sup>8</sup>

We aim at the good of all, the elimination of all suffering and the extension of all the joys that can depend on human actions: we aim at the attainment of peace and love among all human beings; we aim at a new and better society, at a worthier and happier mankind. But we believe that the good of all cannot be really attained except by the conscious participation of everybody; we believe there are no magic formulae capable of solving the difficulties; that there are no universal and infallible doctrines applicable to all men and to all situations; that there do not exist providential parties and individuals, who can usefully substitute their will for that of the rest of humanity and do good by force; we believe that social life always assumes forms that result from contrasting the ideal and material interests of those who think and who make demands. And therefore we call on everybody to think and to want.<sup>9</sup>

By definition an anarchist is he who does not wish to be oppressed *nor wishes to be himself an oppressor*, who wants the greatest well-being, freedom and development for *all* human beings. His ideas, his wishes have their origin in a feeling of sympathy, love and respect for humanity: a feeling which must be sufficiently strong to induce him to want the well-being of others as much as his own, and to renounce those personal advantages, the achievement of which, would involve the sacrifice of others. If it were not so, why would he be the enemy of oppression and not seek to become himself an oppressor?

The anarchist knows that the individual cannot live outside society, indeed he would not exist as a human being but for the fact that he carries within him the sum total of the work of numberless generations, and profits during the whole of his life from the participation of his contemporaries.

He knows that the activity of each individual influences, directly or indirectly, the lives of every other being, and therefore recognises the great law

of solidarity, which predominates in society as in nature. And since he wants freedom for everyone, he must desire that the operation of this essential solidarity instead of being imposed and undergone, unconsciously and involuntarily, instead of being left to chance, and exploited for the advantage of a few to the detriment of the majority, should become conscious, and voluntary, and be applied for the equal benefit of all. The only possible alternative to being either the oppressed or the oppressor is voluntary co-operation for the greatest good of all; and anarchists are, of course, and they cannot but be, for co-operation which is free and desired.

We hope no one will want to “philosophise” and start hair-splitting about egoism and altruism. We agree: we are all egoists, we all seek our own satisfaction. But the anarchist finds his greatest satisfaction in struggling for the good of all, for the achievement of a society in which he can be a brother among brothers, and among healthy, intelligent, educated, happy people. But he who is adaptable, who is satisfied to live among slaves and draw profit from the labour of slaves, is not, and cannot be, an anarchist.<sup>10</sup>

To be an anarchist it is not enough to recognise that anarchism is a beautiful ideal - in theory everyone would agree, including sovereigns, leaders, capitalists, police and, I imagine, even Mussolini himself - but one must want to struggle to achieve anarchism, or at least to approximate to it, by seeking to reduce the power of the State and of privilege, and by demanding always greater freedom, greater justice.<sup>11</sup>

Why are we anarchists?

Apart from our ideas about the political State and government, that is on the coercive organisation of society, which are our specific characteristic, and those on the best way to ensure for everybody free access to the means of production and enjoyment of the good things of life, we are anarchists because of a feeling which is the driving force for all sincere social reformers, and without which our anarchism would be either a lie or just nonsense.

This feeling is the love of mankind, and the fact of sharing the sufferings of others. If I ... eat I cannot enjoy what I am eating if I think that there are people dying of hunger; if I buy a toy for my child and am made happy by her pleasure, my happiness is soon embittered at seeing wide-eyed children standing by the shop window who could be made happy with a cheap toy but who cannot have it; if I am enjoying myself, my spirit is saddened as soon as I recall that there are unfortunate fellow beings languishing in jail; if I study, or do a job I enjoy doing, I feel remorse at the thought that there are so many brighter than I who are obliged to waste their lives on exhausting,

often useless, or harmful tasks.

Clearly, pure egoism; others call it altruism, call it what you like; but without it, it is not possible to be real anarchists. Intolerance of oppression, the desire to be free and to be able to develop one's personality to its full limits, is not enough to make one an anarchist. That aspiration towards unlimited freedom if not tempered by a love for mankind and by the desire that all should enjoy equal freedom, may well create rebels who, if they are strong enough, soon become exploiters and tyrants, but never anarchists.<sup>12</sup>

There are strong, intelligent, passionate individuals, with strong material or intellectual needs, who finding themselves, by chance, among the oppressed, seek, at all costs to emancipate themselves and do not resent becoming oppressors: individuals who, feeling imprisoned in existing society, come to despise and hate every society, and realising that it would be absurd to want to live isolated from the human community, seek to subject society and all men to their will and to the satisfaction of their desires. Sometimes, when they are well-read, they think of themselves as *supermen*. They are unhampered by scruples; they want “to live their lives”; they poke fun at the revolution and at every forward-looking aspiration, they want to enjoy life in the present at any cost and at everybody's expense; they would sacrifice the whole of mankind for one hour's “intensive living” (there are those who have used these very words).

They are rebels, but not anarchists. They have the mentality and the feelings of unsuccessful bourgeois, and when they do succeed they not only become bourgeois in fact, but are not the least unpleasant among them.

We can sometimes, in the ever-changing circumstances of the struggle, find them alongside us; but we cannot, we must not, and we do not wish to be confused with them. And they know it only too well. But many of them like to call themselves anarchists. It is true - as well as deplorable.

We cannot prevent anyone from calling himself by whatever name he likes, nor can we, on the other hand, abandon the name that succinctly expresses our ideas and which, logically as well as historically, belongs to us. All we can do is to try to prevent any confusion, or at least seek to reduce it to a minimum.<sup>13</sup>

I am an anarchist because it seems to me that anarchy would correspond better than any other way of social life, to my desire for the good of all, to my aspirations towards a society which reconciles the liberty of everyone with co-operation and love among men, and not because anarchism is a scientific truth and a natural law. It is enough for me that it should not contra-