



ON POWER

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to retain access to intellectual weaponry, which does directly pertain to the survival of resistance. Similarly, although hate-crimes laws are a ridiculous step towards the outright criminalization of thought itself, it's worth remembering that anything that stops lynchings should be tallied as keeping us alive.

The strategic and tactical distinctions we're forced to make on such issues are necessarily going to be complex and nuanced, but at the same time, as anarchists, we never lose sight of the fact that these programs are evil and that ultimately we oppose them.

Classic welfare programs, of course, are the most clearcut example. Since my family and I owe our lives many times over to Food Stamps and HUD, I'm not going to pretend I'm not biased. Obviously any welfare system is deeply predicated on state violence in the form of taxation and puts a superficial bandaid on the immediacy of capitalism's crimes. But if you think welfare leaves the poor a bunch of lazy queens dependent on the system and defensive of it, you've never been forced to sit and wait while your life hung on the whims of government bureaucracy. Socialist programs that keep the poor alive are always a good thing, strategically. They sustain the class most likely to lead any insurrection and at the same time inspire in that class a fierce hatred of the government as well as a lasting critique of its inefficiency compared to self-organization.

All are reasons to momentarily avoid directly attacking such programs, but in no means are they reasons to avoid conflict with them.

As with any statist means, socialist projects will ultimately only further statist ends. But if by accident they give us any breathing room we, as prisoners, are obliged to seize it. To fight tooth and nail to build our own capacity for charity, mutual aid and self-sufficiency when they're not looking. The only solution to socialist programs is to make them irrelevant.

Two Definitions of Power

In our everyday language we often to use the term "power" in very different ways. This can lead to all manner of confusion. Worse, it can hobble our own understanding of a situation and allow others to twist and distort our capacity to call shit out. The Bolsheviks infamously appropriated and distorted the decentralist, anti-state slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" into a rallying cry for centralized state control. Today one can visit a demonstration and simultaneously see "Power To The People" sprayed on walls while at the same time "Fight The Power" blasts out a stereo. In activist critiques talk of "empowerment" runs parallel to struggles to "abolish all power relations." All of these notions are clearly related, but the occasional dissonance between them poses a danger worth addressing.

There are ultimately, I feel, two broad ways we think of and use the term "power":

Power as capacity

The enhancement or expansion of one's options.

Power as control

The limitation or suppression of one's options.

With empowerment, aside from the abstract connotations of self-actualization, what's really being said is: one has the *capacity* to do something. When one has the 'power to lift something' one has the ability to lift it.

But with the strict sociological definition of power, we specifically refer to *control* over another; coercion perhaps not conveyed in violence or the threat of violence, but

nevertheless a situation where one person loses to some degree their own agency to become an extension of some external will. Or, in the material case, where an object's behavior is determined more fully by one's will. On a first glance this appears to follow from the definition as capacity — when you control other people that control can grant you the capacity to undertake vast projects, to build pyramids and pick cotton.

We say that one individual has 'power over another' when they can determine that individual's actions/thoughts. However that same phrase can be — and often is — read as having *more* power than another. Thus power might simply be a quantity. A substance, the unequal distribution of which between the two individuals is the source of the determination of the other's thoughts/actions. This is the classical Marxist position, often directly referring to the distribution of resources. One person "has" more resources and these resources lend them the capacity to take certain actions with a varying degree of force. Between two individuals the one with the most material capacity can win any contention between wills, and thus has control over the other because they have more capacity. Further this control, once obtained, can grant the controlling party the capacity to do even more. Capacity, being the root concept in this model, often appears to be the subject best deserving the recognition of the term "power."

But is this really so?

We can easily conceive of a situation where, despite equal allocations of capacity, both individuals are capable of coercing one another. Even further, occasions where they do. Two people can assert a high degree of control over one another without either acquiring any additional capacity — with, in fact, such control limiting **both** of them.

This is not just a specific hypothetical, this is the most common case.

Socialist programs, we all know, toe a balance between crippling the working class enough to keep them unable to revolt and satiating them enough with illusions of security to make them unwilling to.

The trick—as any half-cocked fool with a big beard could tell you—lies in exploiting the inherent friction between these two statist tactics. In generating the sort of dynamic social instabilities that make their analysis subject to calculation limits. Where they can't accurately judge which to give us where. When the carrot and the stick are frantically applied in such a way to inflame dissent and then supply us sufficient resources to rebel.

This is the core of our strategy with regard to their "public services."

We embrace that which will keep us in the fight and reject everything else. At the same time we struggle to continue leading insurrection, building gardenboxes in the windows of our cells and preparing to retake that which they have not allowed us to organize for ourselves.

So when I look at a socialist program like affirmative action's mandatory quotas or biases my first step is to recognize that, since ends and means are interconnected, such a statist program will never solve racism or even make inroads. The application of statist oppression will only further inflame and ingrain the social psychoses at hand, although they may make strides towards some superficial semblance of material equality. The statist and hierarchical character of affirmative action is undeniable.

That said, the second step is to investigate whether despite its long term ill effects such a program is strategically necessary to our current survival. And while getting into fancy colleges and jobs at a higher rate is clearly not a matter of material survival, one can argue that some of the ways it provides exit opportunities from inner city "schools" to other forms of public education will allow—in some measure—an underclass

Socialist Programs

Now, obviously, as an anarchist I oppose affirmative action, welfare, public education and the like because they're statist programs and, as such, are inherently, unavoidably, grounded in violence and the perpetuation of power structures. As statist programs they ultimately do more bad than good. And of course given freedom we could accomplish their stated ends far more efficiently without oppressing anyone.

But.

There's nary an anarchist in the world that would go out of their way to abolish such projects first.

The reason for this is strategy. The first task of a prisoner is to escape, and with that goal in mind we're not about to stop eating the meals they give us. Sure those meals are poisoning us. Sure those meals are sapping our strength and conditioning us to salivate on command by the prison guards. But. We. Must. Stay. Alive.

In examining socialist programs it's critical that we not sully our analysis with instinctive allegiances but instead look only upon how effective those programs are at sustaining us. If the warden takes away our meals many of us will die in our cells. This makes the prison's "food program" a momentary necessity. If people are locked out of jobs by the corporate monopolies that our government set up and their homes are bulldozed by investment firms with politicians in their pockets, those people are not going to find new lives as roving vigilantes taking out bureaucrats and burning down office blocks. No, they're going to end up in even greater poverty, abject misery and alienation. Spreading the burden throughout their social nets.

One might be intelligent and manipulative while the other might be strong and brutal. Both individual's wills would be constrained by the other's conditions. The brute may intimidate the conman while simultaneously be in turn manipulated by him. The conman's agency constrained by the ever-present threat of the brute's fury on some areas, while the brute may be beguiled into certain forms of behavior. One might object that this only demonstrates the existence of different kinds of power. But we can, with a little more thought, replicate the same phenomenon with two conmen or two brutes. While in a contest of wills neither party will triumph in achieving their goal, both parties find themselves constrained. Even if one party finally triumphs, the extra exertion is limiting.

The contest of wills itself is constraining. And yet neither party would consider the other powerless. In fact both would likely consider the other to be exerting power over them. The conmen in particular may find themselves ever more deeply wrapped in a relationship they are unable to escape, their thoughts ever more dominated by reactive calculations.

In short, both parties capacities are reduced while we do not say the same of their power. Power thus seems to operate as "control." In everyday use we don't run across situations where one speaks of "having power" in a situation of high capacity and low control. But there are situations where one "has power" with high control and low capacity. We're reminded of the classic image of a king becomes a slave to his own throne. He has power — control — but is controlled himself by the maintenance of it.

Power then — despite some sloppy thinking — is best referenced in the social realm not as a quantity of capacity but rather a relationship of control. Often to some degree *mutual* control.

Power is a psychosis. Our goal as Anarchists is not to equalize power and give everyone the same 5.3 milliHitlers of

oppression each. Unlike the Marxists our goal is not to attempt some balancing of the books. It's to overcome the very premise of our existing social relations.

precisely the same, then on that day government will be just as necessary an evil.

But we all know the future is unwritten.

There is no guarantee that by tomorrow, the people of the world will not have shrugged off the disease that is our pursuit of power. Unlikely, to be sure. But for now, at least, we still have a measure of agency to make ourselves better people. The ability to build alternatives, inspire hope and expose the inherent weaknesses of those would-be warlords and social-democrats. And the capacity to eventually take such a small and fledgling step as abolishing government. Uncertainty exists.

And surely, extended out as much as four centuries from now, that uncertainty is more than sufficient to completely eclipse the world as it is today. So from our standpoint, while it may be necessary today, there is no reason why government should be considered a necessary evil for our grandchildren.

Even so, at the end of the day, perhaps government will remain just as necessary an evil as it was in the morning.

But it will be by no fault of my own.

Can you say the same?

Is Government A Necessary Evil?

Is government a necessary evil?

In a certain sense today, on this specific hour, perhaps it is.

Surely, were the governments of the world and all their popularly associated implements of control to suddenly roll up and disappear at this very moment, there would be a significant upswell in oppression. Without warning or preparation, there would be chaos and violence in the streets. Probably far less than you imagine, but a significant quantity nonetheless. Over the fledgling shouts of anarcho-syndicalist union organizers, anarcho-capitalist property-mongers and smug primitivists heading for the treeline, would be the sound of a people still completely wrapped in the psychosis of power. Bosses, gangbangers, social-democrats and warlords.

From one (or two hundred) violent monopolies, society would shatter into a million competing enterprises, each one more violent than the next.

Is government a necessary evil?

Today, on this specific hour, it might be. Tomorrow, less so. Four months from now, even less. A century, a millennium from now? Surely not at all.

Of course if today should become tomorrow and yet the state of the world remain precisely the same, then government would, at that moment, be precisely as necessary an evil as it is today. If we should somehow drift into the future without doing a single thing to make it a better one. If we should somehow proceed without taking a single step towards making government unnecessary. ...If four centuries should pass and yet somehow the conditions of our world remain

The Seed

The State, like all social phenomena, stems from psychological roots. The State is a way of thinking, a agglomeration of ideas forming a larger structure (or set of structures) that interacts with the surrounding world so as to secure and perpetuate itself.

The State belongs to a wider family of idea-structures sharing a common gene: Power. Which in turn, is one branch of a wider adaptive phenomenon: the assumption that it is better to ignore than to investigate.

You see, there are two ways that an organism can come into prominence. It can, in a variety of ways, keep reaching out into its environment and changing itself in concordance with what it finds, or it can, through other means, wall itself off and struggle to keep its environment from changing it. The later clause often grows to thoroughly infect entire ecosystems, underlying every aspect of social and personal thought. Naturally the ideas, the interacting states of mind it stabilizes, are temporary at best. They're always falling apart, in a million tiny disasters. Rebuilding and re-securing, until the next collapse. Some of these collapses are truly catastrophic, extending across entire societies. Entire religions and civilizations die. But the seed, it has survived. Because it has gone unaddressed itself. It is the remnant of prehistory. The counter-revolution against thought itself.

It is neurological rigidity.

The State is based in the assumption that stability is more important than contact or touch. And everything it does acts to directly minimize interaction between ideas, individuals and nature. The State is, at its core, nothing more than secrecy and stupidity.

Fractured Rulership

Is power stronger when it's centralized or when it's decentralized?

It seems quite strange to assert that the psychoses of power are capable of accomplishing far more when centralized as opposed to decentralized, when this is not true for anything else. Empire is not magically apart from the psychological roots that give rise to it. So why should the project of oppressing people be accomplished more efficiently by the centralization of those efforts rather than through diffuse decentralized approaches?

Certainly it's worth noting that, somewhat unique among goals, power has the property of diminishing the strength of the mind it's rooted in, but I fail to see how this makes the many-minded pursuit of power different from more single, collective or centralized approaches. It's not like the trivially differing particulars between individual power-goals conflict with one another in any non-trivial way. Introduce yet another prince or warlord to a conflict seeking to personally rule all and you hardly lower the body count or the efficiency of enslavement.

Indeed one is left to wonder why those who are otherwise quite aware of the innate inefficiencies and diseconomies of scale in corporations or communism, nevertheless approach the state's attempts to subjugate us as though they were exempt from the same realities. Surely all of Hitler's meticulous clockwork of genocide was proven fundamentally out-gunned in speed and gumption by poorly armed peasants in Rwanda.

It has always appeared quite clear to me that we should consider ourselves lucky to live in a world defined by global

Empire. Obviously our world is still a horrific one, whose innate evil and daily atrocities we, as anarchists, can never begin to accept. But while we work tirelessly to overcome and eradicate power, seizing every opportunity to change the parameters of the game, it does not seem clear to me that we should simply leap upon developments that remove the largest impediment our enemies currently have.