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ANARCHISM AS “ORGANIZATION”

A threat to democracy or a form of organization between equals?

Dr. Francesco Napolitano

Abstract

When speaking of Anarchy, the word “*organization*” appears paradoxical. Anarchism, in fact, recalls the opposite of any form of organization or authority. However, Anarchy itself (from Greek αν-αρχη = “without government”) is the first and basic form of organization between equals. Since the beginning, people tended to organize themselves by associating voluntarily and helping themselves without needing a government. Then, why do people believe they need to be governed at a larger level? Why do they tend to accept governments that produce social differences, create élites and oppress the elected? What do they fear by a group of professionals of the politics and their mercenaries? Modern literature show that a few works have been made on Anarchism and on the Anarchist political thought. This is probably due to a strong ambivalence that characterizes the interpretations of the anarchist movement. On the one hand, anarchism is considered a line of political thought, and their exponents important contributors in creating categories and forms of Western politics. On the other hand, the Anarchism as a movement, it has been accused longly of being a menace to democracy and to the peaceful way of life achieved by our societies¹. The fundamental aim of this research proposal is to study Anarchism as “organization” and trying to fill a lack which is undoubtedly present, today, at an Academic Level. The study is mainly based on notes, books, writings, paper and other bibliographical resources from the university experience of the author. Differently organized, they became also a PhD proposal to the SOAS Doctoral School in London

¹ CHIANTERA-STUTTE P., *Anarchici no-global e Black Bloc: due diverse espressioni dell'anarchismo o due movimenti*, in Ceri P. (a cura di), *La democrazia dei movimenti. Come decidono i noglobal*, Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli, Italy, 2003, pp. 133-168

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Chapter1

Preliminary Marks

It is not easy to talk about Anarchism today. As said, Anarchism is considered a line of political thought, and exponents of the Anarchism like Mikhail Bakunin and Pierre Proudhon are considered valid contributors to the Political Thought of Western World.

Getting in touch with the Anarchist idea is pretty easy, then. Especially studying International Politics. Politics concerns the State and the operating principles of the Nations of the World. And Anarchism played an important role in influencing the Political History of Europe.

It is undoubtedly obvious that the existence of the State is the first and most necessary construction to guarantee the respect of the opinions of all: peoples, citizens and ethnic groups. Some of the most fascinating elements studying the state, in fact, are the traditions, the structures and the institutions of the Nations.

Since 2001, the repressive grasp by the Western Nations against terrorist groups, following the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington, had an important effect on the everyday life of the citizens of those nations, too.

Protection against terrorist groups is undoubtedly important, but the price of this grasp was that freedom of speech was reduced, governments started to be significantly farer from their people, the control on everyone's actions was increased. The prophecies of some authors of XX century on a world under the siege of thought dictatorship seems on its way.

The Economic crisis that struck the Western World; the late "Arab Spring", which radically changed the Middle East and the North Africa; the ISIS menace, and last but not least, the pandemic of Covid-19 of 2020-21, made this phenomenon significantly harder.

Together with the increased control against terrorism, the shortage has raised further the power of banks and financial organizations.

According to the scholar James Glattfelder², less than 1% of the financial elites control the 40% of world resources and the 1% of all these financial elites are banks. Their power is increased throughout the centuries by the use of any kind of mean like wars, criminality, extermination and the conquest of the resources.

These elements are contributing to feed the Clash of Civilizations as predicted by the political expert Samuel Huntington. This is dramatically becoming a reality together with the support of the divisions already determined by the different faiths existing throughout the world.

² JAMES B. GLATTFELDER, "Ownership Networks and Corporate Control: Mapping Economic Power in a Globalized World"

Same happens to a government level. As the eminent academic and Anarchist Noam Chomsky stated once, the elections in the so-called democratic states are only a mediatic event. The balance of power is already established by media and financial coverage and there is no real democratic alternative, as the "rules of the game" in the elections do not envisage forms of participation from below³.

Now, creating a levelled-world without political parties, organizations, states or ideologies - is obviously impossible.

However, putting apart the consideration of Anarchism as vague and confused container of what is purely insurrectionist, no-global or it's purely violence, we could easily find, in the studies of the so-called classical anarchists, elements to read back the modern society.

Basically, anarchists consider the representation as a form of domination of the elites over the masses. They ask concordance between ends and means, refuse the popular oligarchic dictatorship or bureaucracy and representatives and ask that all individuals, the means here and now must be the promotion of the development of individual abilities through fluid, unstructured organizations.

Can this idea be a modern way to promote a society in which community, meritocracy, peace and unit can be restored?

This is the aim of this work. Because as Proudhon stated: "Anarchy is order" not chaos.

³ CHOMSKY N., HERMAN E.S., *La fabbrica del consenso*, Marco Tropea, Milano, 1998.

Chapter 2

State of the Art

Anarchism is on the edge of university study programs and so are the implications of these ideas in our society. Independent groups and study centers seem to have provided larger contributions to the study of Anarchism in its forms.

Anarchist idea is inscribed in a larger tradition, the Marxist belief, and the writings of philosophers and scholars who defined them as “anarchists” have been only studied to a historical level.

However, as stated in 1973 by Colin Ward in the book “Anarchy in action⁴”, different periods in history have been characterized by the return of the idea that everyone should be free to decide of his destiny and build his own future.

As in 1968, when the anarchist flag was exposed on the Sorbonne in Paris during the protests that erupted that year, the anarchist idea of a decentralized politics, together with the request of social reforms and higher power for the students and workers in factory, returned various times in history.

The recent economic crisis that struck the Western World guaranteed this return once again. And recently the anarchist idea appeared again as a valid method of human organization and anarchists had the opportunity to play their own role in the world.

The reason is probably due to the death of the ideologies, a phenomenon that is typical of our days. And Anarchism, which is confined into the larger container of Marxism, has been often neglected just because Marxism itself has been studied in all possible ways.

Now, it's true that Marxism appears as the only alternative to the Capitalist model and libraries are full of books on Marxism, together with treatises, essays and other works on the organization of the Nations.

Anarchism, however, offer an interesting point of view on an anti-capitalistic society, too, since it aims to the liberation of individual energies and abilities, and create a future world in which different models of life could coexist.

This is a fundamental aspect of classical anarchism. And this is radically different from the “nihilism” of those so-called-by-the-media “anarchist” groups like the Black Blocks or the No-Global Movement.

These groups end their action in symbolic and expressive gestures of violence. But violence it is totally at the opposite from the positive way of thinking the society of the Classical Anarchists that consider it as self-collaborative.

Classical Anarchism points to self-government, but universities have no interest neither space nor willing to study self-government as something possible.

⁴ COLIN WARD, “Anarchy in Action”, Eleuthera, 1973

The reason might be that Anarchism is not a subject. There is not an organized study, and anarchist ideas are shared at a different level. Study groups and the movements are the only who discuss the ideas making publications, writing journals and making meetings around the world.

Some of these are the Anarchist Studies Journal, which is published every two years by the Organization with the same name. There is the Emma Goldman Institute for Anarchist Studies, and a large group of study centers in basically all the Nations of the world.

To supply this missing is not easy, but trying to organize the huge quantity of material on Anarchism, could help contributing to create a corpus of study on this argument. We want to looking also if Anarchist Theories are useful to build a better society and contribute to get over the divisions created by wealth differences and social disparities.

In order to demonstrate the validity of these theories, we'll need to analyze, practically, all those cases in which the cooperation between citizens and self-government has appeared more functional than one in which the State maintained its role.

Chapter 3

Potential study approach

Anarchism and its contributions should be studied focusing on those elements that can be contributive to the creation of an alternative society to the one emerging in this New Millennium.

There are different start points for this research.

Anarchism originates from Socialism as a different trend from what the Marxist tendency.

Now, for some scholars, the first division happened in 1848, during the experience of the Paris Commune. Others, instead, consider the 1872 as the year of this division, because 1872 is the year when Bakunin and the Anarchists were expelled from the International Workers Association of The Hague, in the Netherlands.

At the time, Bakunin considered unbelievable that social and political equality could be reached in a state where the proletarian class reaches the power, as Marxists believed. For Bakunin the State must be abolished to avoid that Nations and Governments could become a mean of oppression.

Now, history says that Socialism has failed. Its concept of state was realized in Russia and in other countries, at a point that Socialism has spread throughout the entire world.

Anyway, when Socialism came to power, the objective which was realized was a form of monopolistic capitalism that neglected the hopes of the worker classes and of all those who believed in Socialism as a way to comfort the situation of the masses.

The Anarchist thought and the warnings of Bakunin and Proudhon were realized.

Proudhon, in fact, had predicted that the Russian Socialism was a form of democracy founded on the dictatorship of the proletariat, but with the masses in possess only of the power of a generalized slavery. There is a powerful centralization in Socialist State, a strong police and the opinions of the individuals are not respected, exactly as in every kind of absolute state⁵.

The idea of Proudhon was shared by another famous Anarchist of the XIX Century, Petr Kropotkin who believed that freedom of man can only come via the creation of new forms of expression, and not inside the State⁶.

⁵ PIERRE JOSEPH PROUDHON, *De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières*, Paris 1864 (in its italian translation extracted in PIERRE ANSART, *P.J. Proudhon*, Milan 1978)

⁶ PETR KROPOTKIN, *Modern Science and Anarchism*, London 1912 (in its italian trasnslation, “*La scienza moderna e l’Anarchia*”, Geneve, 1913)

In my opinion, the writings of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin are the necessary start to organize the later studies on Anarchism. Their contribution is undoubtedly historical, but it demonstrates too that their ideas on society appear still valid.

Together with Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin, the thoughts of some anarchists like Gustav Landauer and Martin Buber should be considered. Landauer believed that the State could not be eliminated via revolutions but only creating new relations between people, something our society definitely need in a complex period dominated by terrorism, theocracies and economy.

Buber, instead, said that politics should not be confused with politics, and the first and only way to guarantee a peaceful future is to watch the social principles, which is present only when people have similar interests and this brings them to associate one another.

Apart Landauer and Buber, there is a great number of scholars we can't obviously mention in the limited space of a Proposal.

Anarchism, in fact, is a movement which rose in different moments in history, often in coincidence with economic crisis or in a condition of general instability of the international political situation. The thoughts of other scholars like Stirner, Malatesta, Goldwin, Weil and all those who contributed to the development of the Anarchist thought, for example, have to be analyzed when doing the necessary confrontations between the eras.

Two interesting periods which saw the return of Anarchist Ideas are the Twenties and the Sixties of the XX Century. In this period, Anarchism had its scholars and the international situation was characterized by a general instability caused by political terrorism throughout the world.

When the role of Anarchism in history will be self-evident, we'll use the links we found to understand what could be the role of Anarchism in the future.

Chapter 4

Methodological Approach

In the opinion of the writer, the anarchist thought should focus on three fundamental spheres, each one complementary to the other and each one representing a way to come to terms and clarify the anarchist way of “organizing” the society.

These spheres emanate from different desks: the historian’s, the political scientist’s and the legal experts, and represent the only possible approaches to the reality of the Anarchist Idea nowadays.

As said in the abstract, speaking of “organization” when studying Anarchy might seem a paradox, because Anarchy itself is the opposite of what it is organization.

Using the historian speech, however, it could be possible to understand and justify the rise of Anarchist idea: the political might explain how Anarchism can provide a valid idea of political organization overtaking the idea of state; the legal should show how an anarchist society can survive in harmony, even without needing laws.

The necessary start should be showing how people can develop necessary conditions to realize objectives, when given a common need. This theory, said “*Theory of the Spontaneous Order*”, has been suggested by the anarchist Kropotkin when he studied the society at the time of the French Revolution.

Starting from this theory, it could be understood how leadership in a state can be dissolved and how federations without chiefs can eventually take place of existing governments.

The entire study has its start, obviously, with an intensive work in the libraries.

Later, it will be possible to make investigations on place, contacting groups, study centers and single organizations.

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