



**INCITE  
ITEMS**

**For Educational Iconoclasm**

# Anarchism, Education, and the Road to Peace

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## *Anarchism, Education, and the Road to Peace*

One of the major draws on the US lecture circuit some one hundred years ago was Prince Peter Kropotkin. In October 1897, the revered “father” of modern anarchism, who was born to nobility in Moscow in 1842, addressed the National Geographic Society in Washington. In New York City he lectured to audiences of 2,000 people. In Boston, large crowds at Harvard and other sites heard him speak on the ideas found in his classic works, *Mutual Aid; Fields, Factories and Workshops; Law and Authority; The Spirit of Revolt; and The Conquest of Bread*.

Admission was 15 cents, sometimes a quarter, or else free so that (as Kropotkin desired) “ordinary workers” would be able to attend. Kropotkin came back to America for another tour in 1901. In Chicago, Jane Addams, the director of Hull who would win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, was his host. Emma Goldman (who believed that “organized violence” from the “top” creates “individual violence” at the “bottom”) and Clarence Darrow praised him then, as would Lewis Mumford, Ashley Montague, and I.F. Stone years later. The prince, a serene and

kindly activist-philosopher and the antithesis of the wild-eyed bomb throwers who commonly come to mind when anarchism is mentioned in polite or impolite company, enjoyed packed houses when the military muscles of American interventionism were being flexed with great fervor. In 1896, Marines were dispatched to Corinto, Nicaragua under the guise of protecting US lives and property during a revolt. In 1898 Marines were stationed at Tientsin and Peking, China to ensure the safety of Americans caught in the conflict between the dowager empress and her son. The following year, Marines were sent to Bluefields, Nicaragua to keep their version of the peace. Then it was back to China, ordered there by the McKinley administration to protect American interests during the Boxer rebellion.

Political Washington couldn't fail to notice that Kropotkin was on the loose, going from one podium to another denouncing the favored form of governmental coercion, the military:

Wars for the possession of the East, wars for the empire of the sea, wars to impose duties on imports and to dictate conditions to neighboring states, wars against those "blacks" who revolt! The roar of the cannon never ceases in the world, whole races are massacred, the states of Europe spend a third of their budget on armaments; and we know how heavily these taxes fall on the workers.

Unfortunately, we don't know, or choose not to know. If it were the opposite, the lives and thoughts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century anarchists would be as discussed and studied in schools as those of the politicians who raise the funds for wars and the militarists who are paid

to do the killing. After Kropotkin's second lecture tour, with the crowds growing larger and the prince's message growing bolder, Congress took action. It passed a law in 1903 forbidding anarchists to enter the country. In a letter to Emma Goldman, Kropotkin described an addled and anxious America that "throws its hypocritical liberties overboard, tears them to pieces—as soon as people use those liberties for fighting that cursed society."

In the courses on pacifism and nonviolence that I've been teaching in law school, university, and high school classes since 1982, students get full exposure to Kropotkin. In the first minutes of the semester, I cite the Russian's counsel to students: "Think about the kind of world you want to live and work in. What do you need to build that world? Demand that your teachers teach you that." Hidebound as they are to take required three-credit courses that current curricula impose on students, and a bit unsteady on exactly how to pursue the art of demanding, only a few are up to acting on Kropotkin's call. For me, it's a victory if students make demands on themselves and dive into Kropotkin on their own, inching a bit closer to a theoretical understanding of anarchy.

To get their minds in motion, I ask students what word they first think of when anarchy is mentioned. "Chaos," they answer, "anarchy is chaos." I am consistently surprised by their responses linking anarchy with chaos. However, when I conceptualize chaos, these types of questions come to mind: What about the 40-odd wars or conflicts currently raging on the world's known and unknown battlefields? Isn't it chaotic that between 35,000 and 40,000 people die every day of hunger or preventable diseases? Doesn't economic chaos prevail when large numbers of the world's poor earn less than \$1 dollar a day? Isn't environmental chaos

looming as the climate warms? Aren't America's prisons, which house mentally ill or drug addicted inmates who need to be treated more than stashed, scenes of chaos? All of these questions address the real chaos that is occurring in the world today. Anarchists aren't causing all that, but rather (it might be said) are trying to prevent it. Instead, it falls on those lawmaking legislatures instructing the citizens, raised to be faithful law-abiders, on what is the public good: Laws. Laws. Laws. They make us more "civilized," say our law-making betters. The problem is, laws are made by people and people are often wrong, so why place your faith in wrong-headedness?

The root word of anarchy is *arch*, Greek for rule. A half-dozen archs are in play. Monarchy: the royals rule. Patriarchy: the fathers rule. Oligarchy: the rich few rule. Gynarchy: women rule. Stretching it a bit, there is Noah's-archy: the animals rule. (Pardon the pun. No, wait. Don't pardon it. A certain strain of anarchists, I fear, tends to brood, so a laugh now and again can be useful.) And then we arrive at anarchy, where no one rules. Fright and fear creep into students' minds, especially those who suspect that anarchists are high-energy people with chronic wild streaks. With no rules, no laws, and no governments, what will happen? The question is speculative, but instead of fantasizing about pending calamities that might happen, think about the calamities that are happening now: war, poverty, and the degradations of violence sanctioned by political power and laws. Indeed, as Kropotkin himself once warned:

We are so perverted by an education which from infancy seeks to kill in us the spirit of revolt, and to develop that of submission to authority; we are so perverted by this existence

under the ferrule of a law, which regulates every event in life—our birth, our education, our development, our love, our friendship—that, if this state of things continues, we shall lose all initiative, all habit of thinking for ourselves. Our society seems no longer able to understand that it is possible to exist otherwise than under the reign of law, elaborated by a representative government and administered by a handful of rulers. And even when it has gone so far as to emancipate itself from the thralldom, its first care has been to reconstitute it immediately.

Extending these points, on November 17, 1921, Mohandas Gandhi wrote in his journal:

Political power means the capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power because there is no state.

The solution to the dilemma, at least in the anarchism to which I subscribe, is to remember that either we legislate to fear or educate to goodness. Law abiding citizens are fear abiding citizens, who fear being caught when a law is broken or disobeyed. Fined. Shamed. Punished. When a child is educated to goodness, beginning in a family where the adults have a talent or two in solving their conflicts without physical or

emotional violence, he or she is exposed to lessons of kindness, cooperation, and empathy that leads to what might be called “the good life.”

Anarchists, especially when they dress in all-black and mass-migrate to protests at the World Bank or International Monetary Fund conclaves, don't do much to persuade the public to sign on when they shout epithets at the hapless bureaucrats and papercrats crawling into work. The verbal violence serves mostly to reinforce the perception that anarchists are more generally violent, conjuring the age-old image of the bomb-thrower. It's true enough that anarchists have thrown bombs in isolated demonstrations, although we know that the greater threat are the bomb-droppers (beginning with the two atomic bombs dropped on the Japanese people, and the 35 more tested in the Marshall Islands during the late 1940s and early 1950s – not to mention US bombings in the last 60 years of China, Korea, Guatemala, Indonesia, Cuba, Congo, Peru, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Grenada, Libya, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, and Yemen, to name a few, constituting what Martin Luther King, Jr. once called “the world's greatest purveyor of violence”). To me, and to counter the violence of the state, anarchism needs to be twinned with pacifism. Violent anarchism is self-defeating, and bangs its head into the truth once stated by Hannah Arendt in her essential work *On Violence*: “Violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world.”

And yet, if any creed is less understood than anarchism, it is pacifism. The uneducated equate it with passivity. The really uneducated pair it with appeasement. Among the latter is the late Michael Kelly, whose

column “Pacifist Claptrap” ran on the *Washington Post* op-ed page on September 26, 2001:

Organized terrorist groups have attacked Americans. These groups wish the Americans not to fight. The American pacifists wish the Americans not to fight. If the Americans do not fight, the terrorists will attack America again...The American pacifists, therefore are on the side of future mass murders of Americans. They are objectively pro-terrorist.

A week later he was back with more, in a column arguing that pacifists are liars, frauds, and hypocrites whose position is “evil.” Kelly, whose shrillness matched his self-importance, was regrettably killed in Iraq in April 2003, reporting on a US invasion that he avidly and slavishly promoted.

The pacifist position on countering terrorism was more astutely articulated by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in a lecture on February 24, 2002, at St. Paul’s Cathedral in Boston: “The war against terrorism will not be won as long as there are people desperate with disease and living in poverty and squalor. Sharing our prosperity is the best weapon against terrorism.” Instead of sharing its wealth, however, the United States’ government hoards it. Among the top 25 industrial nations, it ranks 24th in the percentage of its GNP devoted to foreign aid.

Furthermore, pacifists are routinely told that nonviolent conflict resolution is a noble theory, but asked where has it worked? Had questioners paid only slight attention these past years, the answer would

be obvious: in plenty of places, as the following list of recent examples nicely illustrates.

- On February 26, 1986, a frightened Ferdinand Marcos, once a ruthless dictator and a US-supported thug hailed by Jimmy Carter as a champion of human rights, fled from the Philippines to exile in Hawaii. As staged by nuns, students, and workers who were trained by Gene Sharp of the Einstein Institute in Boston, a three-year nonviolent revolt brought Marcos down.
- On October 5, 1988, Chile's despot and another US favorite, General Augusto Pinochet, was driven from office after five years of strikes, boycotts and other forms of nonviolent resistance. A Chilean organizer who led the demand for free elections said: "We didn't protest with arms. That gave us more power."
- On August 24, 1989, in Poland, the Soviet Union puppet regime of General Wojciech Jaruzelski fell. On that day it peacefully ceded power to a coalition government created by the Solidarity labor union that, for a decade, used nonviolent strategies to overthrow the communist dictator. Few resisters were killed in the nine-year struggle. The example of Poland's nonviolence spread, with the Soviet Union's collapse soon coming. It was the daring deeds of Lech Walesa, Nobel Peace Prize winner, and the nonviolent Poles on the barricades with him that were instrumental in bringing about this change.
- On May 10, 1994, former political prisoner Nelson Mandela became the president of South Africa. It was not armed combat that ended white supremacy. It was the moral force of organized nonviolent resistance that made it impossible for the racist government to control the justice-demanding population.

- On April 1, 2001, in Yugoslavia, Serbian police arrested Slobodan Milosevic for his crimes while in office. In the two years that a student-led protest rallied citizens to defy the dictator, not one resister was killed by the government. The tyrant died during his trial in The Hague.
- On November 23, 2003 the bloodless “revolution of the roses” toppled Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze. Unlike the civil war that marked the power struggles in the 1990s, no deaths or injuries occurred when tens of thousands of Georgians took to the streets of Tblisi in the final surge to oust the government.

Twenty-five years ago who would have thought that any of these examples would be possible? Yet they happened. Ruthless regimes, backed by torture chambers and death squads, were driven from power by citizens who had no guns, tanks, bombs, or armies. They had an arsenal far superior to weapons of steel: weapons of the spirit. These were on display in the early 1940s when Hitler’s Nazi army invaded Denmark. Led by a defiant King Christian X, the Danes organized strikes, boycotts, and work stoppages, and either hid Jews in their homes or helped them flee to Sweden or Norway. Of this resistance, an historian quoted in the landmark 2000 film *A Force More Powerful* observed that

Denmark had not won the war but neither had it been defeated or destroyed. Most Danes had not been brutalized, by the Germans or each other. Non-violent resistance saved the country and contributed more to the Allied victory than Danish arms ever could have done.

Only one member of Congress voted no against US entry into the Second World War: Jeannette Rankin, a pacifist from Montana who came to the House of Representatives in 1916, four years before the 19th amendment gave women the vote. “You can no more win a war than win an earthquake,” she famously said before casting her vote. The public reaction reached so strong a virulence that Rankin had to be given 24-hour police protection. One of her few allies that year was Helen Keller, the deaf and sightless Socialist who spoke in Carnegie Hall in New York:

Strike against war, for without you no battles can be fought. Strike against manufacturing shrapnel and gas bombs and all other tools of murder. Strike against preparedness that means death and misery to millions of human beings. Be not dumb obedient slaves in an army of destruction. Be heroes in an army of construction.

Students leaning toward anarchism and pacifism often ask how the principles of both can be personalized. I suggest that one start by examining where you spend your money. Deny it to any company that despoils the earth. Deny it to any seller of death, whether Lockheed Martin (the country’s largest weapons maker) or to subcontractors scattered in small towns in all regions of the land. Deny it to the establishment media that asks few meaningful questions and questions few meaningless answers. In short, “live simply so others may simply live,” which is perhaps the purest form of anarchy.

In my own life, I’ve tried to do it by means of a cruelty-free vegan diet, consuming no alcohol, caffeine, or nicotine, and getting around

Washington mostly by a trusty Raleigh three-speed bicycle. Is any machine more philosophically suited to anarchism than a bicycle? Is there an easier way to practice anarchism than joyriding on two wheels? Being street smart, which means being totally considerate of other travelers and pedaling safely, I think of all the useless laws the anarchist-cyclist can break: riding through red lights, stop signs, one way signs—all the while getting a feel for outdoor life and its weathers, those balms cut off by windshields.

Speaking experientially—meaning 35 years and more than 70,000 miles of motion by leg-power—I’ve become an autophobe. In the clog of traffic, when car owners are penned like cattle on a factory farm and torture themselves in massive tie-ups, I remember some lines by Daniel Behrman in his minor 1973 classic from *Harper’s Magazine*, “The Man Who Loved Bicycles:”

The bicycle is a vehicle for revolution. It can destroy the tyranny of the automobile as effectively as the printing press brought down despots of flesh and blood. The revolution will be spontaneous, the sum total of individual revolts like my own. It may already have begun.

William Saroyan likewise wrote in his introduction to 1981’s edited volume *The Noiseless Tenor*, that “the bicycle is the noblest invention of [hu]mankind.” Amen to that, but only if you add that anarchism is a close second.