Titles Reviewed:


Sean Sheehan, Anarchism, Reaktion, 2003, 175 pages, $26.95.


In Britain, the rich get richer whilst its misguided peoples - whatever their income, gender, race or sexual orientation - are obsessed with wealth, sport and aping celebrity lifestyles. Meanwhile a handful of British 'anarchist' intellectuals with university positions do little more than engage in sophistry. Recent UK philosophical studies of anarchism display an unappealing and depressing similarity of method, discourse and presentation. These books start by discussing anarchism before rapidly moving on to post-modernism and then "post-structuralisms" without ever attempting to explain or define either of these academic monstrosities or how to distinguish between them. This work is totally detached not only from the concerns facing our movement, but from any engagement with the actual world in which we live (mirroring a recent trend in post-Marxist circles, in which "scholarship" increasingly inverts Marx's famous dictum that the point is not simply to understand the world, but rather to transform it - the new generation of "radical" academics too often seek neither understanding nor social transformation, but rather to lose themselves in an increasingly self-referential haze of abstraction and gibberish).

Kina's Anarchism, for example, first categorizes traditional or recognized anarchist personalities and schools by means of a name-dropping extravaganza and a dense, labored, ism-infested analysis. The tone, scientific-looking tables and graphs ensure that the casual reader will be alienated as well as totally confused by 20 pages of meta-theorizing. On page 21 the world is introduced to "new anarchist thinking," the "main thrust" of which is "The belief that the struggle by workers for economic emancipation no longer holds the key to anarchist revolution." The parameters of Kina's "new anarchy" are defined by "primitivism," "post-modernism," "ecologism," "feminist post structuralism," "anarcho-capitalism," etc. (22-25). This by no means exhausts the list, as there seems to be no end to the list of new anarchisms. The arsenal of this ism-bombardment is an array of trendy academic -isms, (as long as they aren't anarchist-isms).

There is endless analysis of primitivism throughout the book, but knowledge of post-modernism and structuralism is simply assumed. The basic idea behind this intimidating and wholly academic terminology is that the quest of rationality and science is fundamentally at odds with the nature "of reality." Along with rejecting all this boring class struggle stuff, the "new anarchists" also reject "truth" and the liberating potential of the "scientific, rationalist tradition
that has dominated anarchist thought." (37) This erroneous distinction between the "old" and "new" anarchism is the central focus of Kina's book.

The new anarchism looks "beyond class inequality to the cultural and ecological impact of the global market economy." (51) However, Kropotkin didn't promote an exclusively class- and property-based conception of struggle and liberation, nor did he blindly follow the prevailing scientific-rationalist case for the large-scale industrialization and capitalization of trade and agriculture. Kropotkin's famous book Fields, Factories and Workshops was surely one of the first works to alert people to the economic and social-ecological ills and absurdities of abandoning culturally local or bio-regionally based economies.

Kina's Post-Modernist/Structuralist/Situationist anarchists, unlike poor old Kropotkin, "understand that power permeates social relations" rather than being "centralized" or based upon "property relations." (73) Kropotkin, not unlike Kina's postmoderns, wrote that the source of organization and power was "everywhere and nowhere,"1 and that all associations held possibilities for liberation and enslavement:

It is not the form of an association which involves slavery; it is the ideas of individual liberty which we bring with us to an association which determine the more or less libertarian character of that association. This applies to all forms of association. Cohabitation of two individuals under the same roof may lead to the enslavement of one by the will of the other, as it may also lead to liberty for both. The same applies to the family or to the cooperation of two persons in gardening or in bringing out a paper. The same with regard to large or small associations, to each social institution.2

Chapter Two ends with a discussion of "lifestylism" and "primitivism" that Kina rightly associates with individual rebellion and expression as compared to the "postmodernist focus on networks of individuals and their movements." (74) Again, Kropotkin also conceived anarchism as emerging, to a very large degree, from the networking of like-minded individuals in every conceivable area of human interest and inquiry. Even under statecapitalism, Kropotkin observed, Europe is covered by thousands of voluntary associations for study and teaching, for industry, commerce. Science, art, literature, exploitation, resistance to exploitation, amusement, serious work, gratification and self-denial, for all that makes up the life of an active and thinking being. We see these societies rising in all nooks and corners of all domains: political, economic, artistic, intellectual. Some are as short lived as roses, some hold their own for several decades, and all strive - while maintaining the independence of each group, circle, branch or section, - to federate, to unite, across frontiers as well as among each nation; to cover all the life of civilized men with a net, meshes of which are intersected and interwoven.3

The fundamental principles of post-modernism were anticipated and explored by thinkers like Kropotkin, as Morris has recently argued.4 Post-modernism is just an intellectual fashion statement born of state-subsidized French universities who have flooded the Earth with their dross. There is nothing new, in fact there is nothing at all, behind Kina's "post-modern anarchism," which is an ephemeral academic phantom-ism, representative of nobody and of no organization, anarchist or otherwise.
The third and final chapters consider the relationship between anthropology and anarchism, followed by brief summations of a number of different conceptions and strategies for achieving anarchism. The presentation is entirely inconclusive and based upon material familiar to anybody acquainted with anarchism. The book ends with a brief consideration of pacifism and violence with particular reference to the contemporary anti-globalization movement, concluding that: "The promise of the anti-globalization movement is that it avoids the staging and workerism of syndicalist strike actions." (155)

The Anti-Globalization Carnival is no more spontaneous than a workers’ rally, often far less effective, and much more easily characterized as an amusing side-show. The forms of protest and struggle promoted by Kina see the self-assembled netizens of the anti-globalization network dressed as fairies aiming fluffy toys at the security forces protecting WTO and G8 conference venues. Such protests are theatrical performances that avoid the curse of workerism by being stupid irrelevancies; street theater entirely removed from the drama of the main stage.

Sheehan begins where Kina ends. Anarchism is introduced through a discussion of violence and pacifism within the context of an interpretative analytical account of the methods and events of the anti-capitalist/globalist protests in Seattle (1999) and Genoa (2001). The "anarchist convergence center" established in a warehouse in Seattle, conducted "non-violence training sessions" and "served as a clearing house for a variety of organizational needs" of the anti-capitalist network. The "Carnival against Capital" was self-organized through the networking of "anti-hierarchical affinity groups" linked by "consensus decision making at every level." "Throughout the five days of protest, key anarchist principles were seen to work so successfully that other non-anarchist militants adopted them." (1-2)

These "Carnivals," Sheehan announces, "inaugurated a new moment in history." (159) It is nearly eight years since history recommenced in the battle for Seattle at the WTO meet in 1999. As the present Doha round of the WTO bumbles along, it is abundantly clear that the poorer nations are again forced to accept the conditions imposed by and favoring the interests of rich capitalists predominantly representing a few very wealthy countries and trading blocs. The executives of global capitalism were not even tickled by the "mini armies of protestors dressed as fairies and armed with feather dusters." (8)

All the books under review in this essay cite the anti-capitalist network and the Zapatistas as contemporary examples of anarchy in action and combine this with misplaced optimism concerning their ability resist the globalization of Capital. These anarchist-like movements were the first extensive anti-hierarchical non-party grassroots movements to really utilize the global organizational potential of the Web. And this in itself makes them of historical interest.

But there are a great many activities being organized on the Web, and by no means are all of them pro-social. While carnivals may be fun, and certainly contain important elements of selforganization, many have become major tourist attractions that disrupt the normal flow of events (and sometimes assert diversity), but pose no real challenge to capital or the state. If the global capitalist offensive is to be contained and defeated, strategies that strike at its economic heart will have to be developed.
Kina spreads her ism web too widely, devoting endless space to non-anarchist anti-statist expressions of capitalism and primitivism. In contrast Sheehan is unequivocal about the non-authoritarian socialist roots and essence of the anarchist movement: "Primitivism is a particular brand of American anti-authoritarianism that claims to be anarchist but which, like anarcho-capitalism, has a more natural home on the individualist fringes of right-wing extremism." (43)

Kina and Sheehan unfortunately share a commitment to what Kina (65-6) terms "post-situationist anarchism." Thus on page 57, just when we thought we were going find out more about anarchism, Sheehan suddenly presents us with a ponderous chapter devoted to the Social Ontology of Marx and Nietzsche that rightly belongs to a work on 19th Century German metaphysical philosophy. After our Marxist re-education session we abruptly return to anarchism. Sheehan provides a brief, informal overview of important historical acts of direct action - the Diggers, Ranters, the French Revolution, Alexander Berkman, the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Revolution, Paris 1968, the British Angry Brigade, the British Class War Federation and the Zapatistas. Comparison of violent and non-violent forms of direct action is the major theme used to link these events and movements together. Then, the book ends very feebly with a directionless pastiche of "cultural anarchism," involving everything from Shakespeare's plays to avant-garde movies.

In contrast, Benjamin Franks' Rebel Alliances argues that the anti-globalization movement has been a fizzle. He admits in his Introduction that the initial inspiration and long-since-discarded first draft of his book focused on the forgotten events surrounding the Carnival Against Capitalism protests of June 1999. Like other recently published British academic books inspired by these protests, Franks' analysis of British anarchism is deeply influenced by postism.

Postism describes a generalized apostasy, with the corresponding rejection of any notion of essential truth. A quintessential requirement of a post-whatever-ist is a university post or aspirations to secure one. Postists conclude that we are now post-everything, but can never hope to have any sign-post to anything. According to post-ism, the ball of knowledge has been irretrievably kicked out of the stadium of ideas by a handful of French academics whose philosophical opponents ridicule and dismiss them on account of foggy thinking and stylistic flatulence.

The answer as to why the anarchist movement concerns itself with trendy French intellectual sophistry must be sought in an examination of the deep malaise of anarchist thinking in particular and contemporary philosophical enquiry in general. I don't believe we exist in either a post-capitalist or post-anarchist environment, and the concept of post-modern society is meaningless phraseology. I'm not too dumb to understand postism; I simply reject it as a conceptual vacuum - a philosophically and politically empty post-box. Postism is an intellectual position from which nothing of philosophical value can be extracted. In practice it rests not upon relativist sophistry but upon academic vulturism. This involves the post-graduate, post-doctoral and post-mortem dissection and separation of the leading insights of anarchist thinking from the corpse of the workers' movement during an era when the worker was shackled to the Thatcher-Reagan whipping-post and endured a 30-year lashing by Anglo-American style state-capitalist madness. The result is oil and water wars, depressed wages, rising food prices and a global environmental backlash that threatens the very basis of civilization.
Franks opens his tome with a lengthy, and depressing, history of British anarchism that concludes with the collapse of the Class War Federation. I personally thought Class War antics and literature hysterically funny at the time and gleefully sold copies of their rags to 14-year-old boys who'd cadge the 20 pence cover price from their harassed and bewildered mothers accompanying them at bookstalls. But it hardly requires the 100 pages of analysis and footnotes designed to help politics students better understand the subtle nuances and critical discourses contained within Class War's intellectually undemanding ideology. Franks' history of British anarchism more or less ends with Class War's demise.

In the first half of chapter 2 Franks presents a passable introduction to moral theory by considering the ideas of Aristotle, Kant, Mill and Hegel. Then with the usual post-modernist arrogance, Franks concludes that "classical anarchism," as with all past philosophers, was hopelessly "essentialist" with its "fixed, benign, humanist" ideal of "human nature." (112)

This is utter rubbish. Kropotkin, for example, believed that nature has never been constant, fixed or predictable. His scientific investigation of ice ages and recent climate changes led him, before becoming a revolutionary, to conclude that there is "nothing permanent in nature," it has "no fixed laws" and our "perception of stability" in nature is but a "provisory" and ever-changing "equilibrium" out of which new orders emerge continually from "everywhere and nowhere." (Anarchism: Its Philosophy & Ideal)

Kropotkin believed humans are a "result of the environment" in which they "grow up." He anticipated the superficially original insights of Foucault, who first achieved notoriety for his work on prisons. Kropotkin noted that the "artificial environment" of the prison led to a perverse situation where it became difficult to discern who the real criminals are: the inmates or the keepers? Put saints in a prison officer's uniform, suggests Kropotkin, and the "institution" will soon make them "petty, mean persecutors." (Prisons and Influence on Prisoners) Kropotkin argues that there is no fixed or essential human nature, and that the constantly changing, infinitely and locally variant natural or artificial environments or contexts where people are born, raised, live or work shape their ethical outlooks and moral behavior.

I'm unconvinced that this sort of moral relativism helps in our search for collective moral guidelines and practices that might improve society and better inform our actions, but it's certainly at the heart of Kropotkin's classical anarchist thinking and not something that postism uncovered a century or so later.

Prefigurism is Franks' intimidating word for the simple idea that our actions should be consistent with or reflect our ideals in terms of organizational methods or lifestyle choices. A vegetarian group could not consistently serve meatballs at a fund raiser and would automatically prefigure their collective dream of a vegetarian society with sumptuous culinary offerings of fruit, nuts and vegetables.

Anarchists generally are right to focus upon the questions of means and ends in response to the ghastliness of Stalinism or Pol-Pot's Cambodia. In the light of these monstrosities committed in the name of socialism and collectivism, it has been vitally necessary to carefully examine the tactical failures and human misery that authoritarian Utopian experimentalism has caused in
overriding ethical values and considerations in the name of a grand revolutionary Project imposed by intellectuals from above through the agencies of a police state.

There is a certain amount of validity in Frank's insistence on making practical political activity and propaganda consistent with the broad theoretical ideals of the activists and with the goals of their actions. Politicians continually act in ways that are contrary to their stated ideals and the desire to more consistently conduct the affairs of anarchist propaganda and direct action groups is admirable. But the obsessive application of prefigurative thinking can yield small, insular, cultish cliques connected with particular micro-ideologies and subcultures whose energy is expended by inwardly focused critical (Maoist-like) self-examination of the group's internal processes, members and relationships rather than engaging with the broader society they say they want to change. It is not possible for a handful of anarchist militants to live free lives whilst the broader society remains under the dominance of capital and the state.5

Franks usefully explores the idea that anarchist social goals are prefigured by direct action. The egalitarian principles of anarchism are prefigured in virtuous or courageous "direct actions" of the "oppressed," "subject" or "effected" groups and classes (whether consciously anarchist or not) autonomously self-organizing to resist state-capitalism. The direct and unmediated actions of workers and other oppressed groups in their collective struggle against injustice, Franks argues, unlike the secret police forces and representative hierarchies of the state, employ means that are compatible and prefigure their vision of a free and equal society.

Franks' "book analyses anarchist tactics through moral categories developed in Aristotle's Ethics." (101) The view that virtue is learnt and expressed by individuals through their own concrete moral practice and activity is a currently fashionable Aristotelian approach to reconciling abstract theoretical principles and actual political practice in the attainment of social happiness. An Aristotelian approach is consistently applied by Franks in his lengthy consideration of anarchist prefigurative ethics and the use of violent or non-pacifist tactics by anarchist or oppressed groups in pursuit of social justice or ultimately peaceful ends and goals. In opposition to the pacifist cult that has dominated British academic anarchism for a century, Franks argues in a predictable post-modern fashion that violence isn't wrong or right and that, depending upon the context, it may be perceived as morally outrageous or supremely courageous. Whether the use of violence in pursuit of social happiness is acceptable depends on participants considering what is tactically responsible or appropriate with respect to the situation and community in question.

I couldn't tell you what Franks' means by "activist post-structuralisms." Franks says that "post-structuralisms" are equivalent or "consistent with ideal type anarchism" (159) and the "anarchist ideal subject." (153) If anarchism in 'ideal and subject' is more or less the same as post-structuralism why not just use the plain old term anarchism? Anarchism is already an intimidating, poorly understood and often ill-defined word. Postisms add unnecessary or unhelpful semantic complication and confusion. Mark Leier, in his highly recommended Bakunin: A Biography (2006), suggests postism is an "elitist" and "banal liberalism" (204) enabling and representing "the flight of intellectuals from radical politics" into "identity politics and resignation." Leier further observes how posties believe "the working class" has "somehow
failed in its prescribed historical mission" and can "now be abandoned, ignored or explained away" (273). Franks is guilty of every charge levelled by Leier.

Escapism, class-denial, pseudo-radicalism, glorification of minority or lifestyle identification, do-nothingism and academic egoism - these infect every page of Franks' book. Franks explains how identity groups oppress each other in a myriad of ways. We are told that the industrial working class in post-modern societies is a small incohesive group whose individual members primarily identify themselves with particular age-sets, sexualities, lifestyles, ethnicities, cultures or places rather than according to their position in traditional economic class hierarchies that are now blurred or disintegrating. Contemporary Anglo-American philosophical anarchism (British postism and Bookchin in the U.S.A.) attack hierarchy instead of class in order to point to the need for resistance to a multiplicity of oppressive hierarchical structures, relationships, traditions and institutions that they consider equally if not more important than fighting capitalism and economic class division.

Franks is haunted by a Kafkaesque world where all people are exploited or oppressed to some degree in some context or another, and everyone in turn oppresses some other group in some other context or situation: "An individual or group in one social position may be subjected to forces that place them in a subordinate position, yet in another context they may wield oppressive authority. Oppression does not have one ultimate source, so consequently there is no vanguard or universal agent whose liberation ends all oppression." (154-5)

"There is no irreducible single contradiction, such as that between Worker and Capital, just as there is no revolutionary subject. Forms of power and their intersections are in continual flux, often responding to countervailing forms of resistance, so too arenas of antagonism and identities of radical subjects are also altering." (192) The only thing we can know for sure is that we don't know against whom and with whom to organize the revolutionary transformation of society. Franks is telling us nothing whilst providing unprincipled recipes for doing nothing.

The concluding two sections of Frank's long book discusses Jean Baudrillard's "alluring pessimism." (341) Baudrillard's banal theory of "hyper-passivity" and "total disengagement" suggests that the French are only interested in football so radicals should consume more until the capitalist system "bursts." (344) We may have a barely habitable planet long before this undesirable eventuality and we should question why Franks' book, subtitled "contemporary British anarchisms," concludes with a long discussion of Baudrillard's hyper-stupidity.

Marx, Bakunin and Kropotkin all thought in nationalist terms sometimes expressed in ways now considered offensive or racialist-nationalist. The inherent dangers and destructiveness of racialist-nationalist-statism was realized and illustrated by two terrible world wars last century. It is generally agreed by all but the far right (as Rudolf Rocker suggested in his masterpiece Nationalism and Culture) that nationalism and racialism involve mass collective group passions that can be so disadvantageous to progress that we must seek to keep them in check whilst developing new cultural identities, economic relationships and human ideals. Ongoing ethnic and nationalist violence throughout the world shows us that nationalism is not something that can be reformed. It is often overlooked that Kropotkin thought that mutual aid rarely extended beyond the group (though the parameter of the socially relevant group had expanded greatly over time)
and that hostility and aggression was the norm towards outsiders. The negative side of the human individual's tendency to develop strong group identities can be readily observed in gangs, religious fundamentalism, nationalism and hatred toward foreigners. The group has allowed for collective economic survival, but also manifests itself in opposing xenophobic tendencies. Franks is right to point out that the traditional left neglected racialist-nationalist beliefs and conflicts that continue to dog the human quest for social-environmental peace and harmony. But, Franks' attempt to construct the New Society around identity politics reinforces regressive and divisive group psychologies that anarchism (and any ideally perfect future world vision) should be fighting to overcome.

Elderly women are consistently among some of the poorest people in many societies. Gays fear the spectre of the death penalty in some states. Immigrants and minority communities frequently face oppression and discrimination. I don't wish to minimize the importance of the struggle for women's, gays and immigrant rights. But these movements have little to do with anarchism in particular because they impact upon all political and cultural outlooks and movements. It is perfectly possible to struggle for women's rights without challenging over-arching systems of oppression, or to demand that gays be afforded the same "right" as "straight" people to serve as cannon fodder in the state's endless wars. Many significant reforms have been won through struggles by oppressed groups. But such everyday achievements of liberal reformism, involving 'victories' and expanding personal liberty for gays, Blacks and women in the USA and elsewhere don't alter the fact that 47 million Americans don't have health cover. The 'working poor' in the richest country are denied basic healthcare whether they are gay or black or anything else. In South Africa scores of 'foreign' black immigrants were brutally murdered a few years back in a 'spontaneous' eruption of black on black violence. In contrast to this shameful rabble, the initiative by South African Dock Workers a few weeks before these tragic events successfully prevented the unloading of a Chinese arms shipment bound for the Mugabe dictatorship of neighboring Zimbabwe. Only an international workers movement that fosters de-racialized, nonnationalist solidarity against WalMart-ization, off-shoring and dictatorship can conceivably overcome racism and nationalist hatred between the world's peoples.

Franks slots human social dynamics into two basic categories: Groups and Hierarchies. Individuals identify themselves and are identified and stratified by others according to race, place, ethnicity, gender, sexuality. In his view the goal of contemporary anarchism is to break down hierarchies that place one of these several identity groups higher than another. This is nothing but the liberal-democratic notion of tolerance, respect and legal protection for 'other' individuals, sexualities, religions, peoples, nationalities, ideas, views and "experiments of living."

The idea of parity or equity between elemental social-biological groupings or minority sexual expressions and identities is associated with liberal, socialist, anarchist and 'modern' thought in the broadest sense. But liberalism only asks that foreigners and members of other natural classes be accorded universally applicable and legally enforceable individual human rights and freedoms whilst providing no solution to the gross exploitation of poor people, resources and environment by global capitalism. Liberalism seeks only to reform or humanize nationalism and capitalism through NGOs or legislation outlawing or preventing such things as the abuse or enslavement of children. These are big and important issues, but liberalism is addressing the social-
environmental symptoms of gross economic inequality and nationalism rather than attacking its root capitalist causes.

Franks "post-anarchism" can be differentiated from 'banal liberalism' only in terms of the emphasis placed upon the need or practice of "unmediated" and "direct action" by members of these "oppressed subject groups themselves" (210) rather than reliance upon politicians or liberal legislative reforms. NGOs of all political hues that conduct protests and pranks or emphasize and facilitate 'self-help' and independence among disadvantaged or neglected groups are modern liberal-activist tactics that approach anarchist notions of local and direct action. Franks falsely conflates and confuses contemporary liberal-activism with anarchism.

Kropotkin saw the flourishing of global mutual-aid and interest groupings as a distinctive feature of the late 19th century that he predicted would evolve as intellectual tolerance, technology, education and communication improved. It was the vast potentiality for liberal mutual aid and interest networks that Kropotkin saw as an organizational fact of recent human social evolution that concretely supported and illustrated the possibility of a global civilized anarchy. But, unlike Franks, Kropotkin didn't confuse and conflate the growth and increasing sophistication of liberal mutual aid, interest and activist networks with the political and economic goals and practices of anarchism as an organized international worker's liberation movement.

Kropotkin, Bookchin and Franks all agree that "at the heart of anarchism is the rejection of Hierarchy." (156) Appeals for anti- or non-hierarchical tactics, organization, social-relationships etc. , occur in every section of Franks' book because opposition to social hierarchy is the One and Only principle that is shared by All movements inspired by anarchism or of interest to anarchists. Moreover anti-hierarchical ideology differentiates anarchism from All other major alternative political philosophies and practices. Unfortunately anti-hierarchical approaches provide a convenient intellectual flight path for Bookchin and UK posties to bypass the workers.

The idea that hierarchy can simply be wished away is based upon an absolutely false notion of animal and human collective social behavior that Kropotkin first introduced in Mutual Aid. Social animals do not live in egalitarian communal groups as Kropotkin supposed. With the exception of goldfish, cockroaches and other lowly animals that naturally live in small non-hierarchical groups, all social animals above this level collectively compete for mates and/or territory in the creation of economic and/or reproductive hierarchies.

Hierarchical and egalitarian forms of collectivity coalesce and coexist in animal and human groups and societies. All the Meerkats in a colony will collectively defend their territory as an egalitarian group but females aggressively compete with one another for exclusive dominance of a single reproductive female hierarchy. Observations of groups of wild chimps, baboons and bonobos reveal very different and highly complex structures of interacting hierarchies and networks regulating the behavior of individuals and sub-groups in relation to one another. In the light of these broad evolutionary antecedents, we should be less demoralized when formally ever-so-radical students or union shop stewards appear to so readily and rapidly ascend the organizational or political career elevator and abandon their former fellow workers. The social behavior of animals suggests an innate tendency in the very structure of our brains responsive to status symbols and one's position on social ladders. We were hierarchical before we were human.
Age-hierarchies are a natural outgrowth of the family and primary teaching/learning experience. The trainee is necessarily at the bottom of a natural hierarchy until the candidate learns or masters the job or trade.

But we mustn't despair of eradicating (economic class) hierarchies. Human economic-class, sex or racial hierarchies have been collectively and culturally constructed, rather than genetically determined. Humans have a strong genetically inherited innate preference for sweet fatty foods known to be unhealthy. We try to moderate our natural obsessions with junk food and TV dinners to lessen the social epidemic of obesity. Contraception is unnatural, but beneficial to social health and women's liberty. Economic class hierarchies of state-capitalism cause global social, environmental and individual psychological harm. Anarchism says that it is necessary to moderate our natural obsession with money, status symbols and trashy Las Vegas culture; to liberate the economically enslaved and save the planet by the self-organization of the working poor in opposition to capitalism and state. Anarchism seeks a society that goes beyond capital's formula of co-existence where formal equality exists alongside cavernous economic or political inequities maintained and expressed in class hierarchies and upheld by national or international forces of law and order.

But these hierarchical relationships won't obliterate themselves; they require an organized movement that seeks to build broad solidarity, and to tackle our oppression where it manifests itself, and from which it draws its power. Unfortunately, much recent "anarchist" theorizing is an active impediment to the pursuit of human freedom.

A clear alternative

If you wished to give a book introducing anarchism to an interested but ignorant friend or colleague then Ward's 1973 study Anarchism in Action would be a good first choice. A good second choice is his new, very short introduction to Anarchism.

Ward covers the same ground as Kina and Sheehan (and more besides) in one third of the space in a language and style that is far less intimidating and confusing. Ward pays considerably more attention to clearly presenting the subject matter of anarchism as "simply" as he can. Many of the great anarchist writers of the past sharpened their quills penning newspaper columns and penny pamphlets. The ability to present a case in a short space and in a way that can be generally understood by a very wide audience is usually only acquired through many years of work in this sort of literary environment. Ward is no exception to this rule. As foundereditor of the influential and fondly remembered British monthly Anarchy (1961-70) and prolific contributor to mainstream British social journals (e.g. New Society) Ward developed the ability to write in a clear, scholarly way that not only appealed to student radicals of the 1960s and '70s, but also to their teachers and the public generally.

As an unabashed disciple of Kropotkin, Ward has also made a conscious and successful attempt to write, as Kropotkin does, in as clear and as succinct a way as one is able. The other important principle that Ward learnt from Kropotkin is that anarchism is not some complicated intellectual theory but is always in action and existing 'everywhere and nowhere.' Anarchism permeates society, and if one looks into the 'nooks and corners' of contemporary and past societies one finds
organizations and practices in specific historical, geographical and cultural contexts that unconsciously embrace anarchism as the most practical solution to the needs of individual and collective life of the day.

After covering the major historical personalities and events Ward takes a thematic approach to introducing anarchism. Each subject is presented by means of beautifully selected quotations from authoritative historical and contemporary sources, unified and combined by lucid analysis. There are sections devoted to the welfare state, nationalism, fundamentalism, prisons, education, federalism, regionalism and the sexual revolution. These self-contained little studies may be described as highly polished updated versions of the sort of articles that once featured in Ward's Anarchy magazine.

Ward, like Sheehan, is unequivocal in his rejection of the new-age theories of anarcho-capitalism and anarcho-primitivism. The anarcho capitalists are dismissed as unimaginative academic apologists of "untrammeled market capitalism." (69) The relative success of cultural anarchism when compared to its dismal political failures is a positive influence that both Sheehan and Ward wish to emphasize. Civilization is just as much a Utopian and largely unrealized goal as that of anarchism. In fact anarchism as Kropotkin portrayed it would be the very height of civilization.

The global spread during the past two decades of aggressive and regressive religious fundamentalisms and, an exploitative cancerous consumer-capitalist neo-conservative culture has reversed in Ward's lifetime many of the advances in our thinking and practice with respect to sexuality, tolerance, education and ethnic and social integration. Primitivism 's enthusiasm for a return to a taboo-ridden tribal past is as fanciful as it is repugnant. Primitivism regards civilization as something which has been achieved, but the opinion of the overwhelming majority of people is that humankind still lives in a barbaric state and the goal of a civilized, secular, tolerant, educated, socially, ecologically, regionally and globally integrated world is a distant dream that may never be realized. Rather than opposing civilization, Ward is correct in stating that anarchists relative to their comparatively small historical movement have contributed enormously to a series of "modest gains in civilizing" sexuality, education, punishment and so on. (75)

Kina's "new anarchism" is focused upon the post-modern rejection of truth and reason. Such approaches grossly misrepresent the historical spirit of anarchism and are inherently foolhardy in a world threatened by religious and ethnic stupidity, hatred and intolerance. Ward highlights the growth of individual (mystical ecology and primitivism) and mass clerical (Islamic and Christian) irrationalism and fundamentalism. He regards these trends as the greatest threat to the development of libertarian thought and practice in the world today. Ward warns us that this contemporary mixture of primitivism, post-modernism and irrationalism is a dangerous intellectual and social exercise as "toleration" itself was a product of science and reason and cannot exist without it. (38)

My only criticism of Ward's excellent little book is that it concludes rather weakly with a vague final chapter conveying familiar environmental messages of small is beautiful, local is focal, and best is less. After a rather good penultimate chapter on regionalism and federalism these ideas are not adequately linked with anarchistic visions of local and global federations of ecological
regions paralleling or replacing both local cultural and national territorial identities, boundaries and borders (a perspective sometimes known as eco- or bio-regionalism).

This essay is an edited version of a much longer series originally published in the Australian paper Rebel Worker.

**Footnote**
