

# The Tasks of Anarchism Today

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IN THE LAST ISSUE OF "INSERT" I put forward the view that the main task facing anarchists at the present time is the development of a new and distinctive approach to the theory of society: one which starts from the individual, not the collective, and sees society simply as part of the total environment with which the individual has to cope. In this view "society" is not to be considered as an independent entity existing outside the individual and having the "right" to make demands upon his conduct in every sphere of life. Instead, we are to consider "society" simply as a term which describes the constellation of relationships between people in community, a set of relationships which is consciously constructed to serve the needs of each person in the community. The great value of this approach lies in its unqualified acceptance of the fact that people are unique and unlike each other, and so each relationship established within the community is likewise unique and unlike any other. The community that matures in freedom will be tolerant in a way that our existing communities cannot be; the best we can manage at the moment is to tolerate deviations from accepted patterns of behaviour - but in a truly free community there would be no overall acceptance of patterns as we know them, only of specific and unique relationships.

The immediate problem, of course, is what anarchists can do in the concrete situations which confront them. What form of action is most likely to contribute to the sort of community that we are aiming at? From the nature of anarchism it is impossible to construct a Vade Mecum (i.e., a pocket handbook, for those who prefer the English version) of "Things Every Anarchist Should Know About Social Action", but there are some philosophies of action that are inherently more likely to succeed than others. Thus the suggestion that anarchists should assist the Abercromby Tenants Association to get one of their number elected to the City Council seems to me to be fundamentally unsound, despite the assurances that the "real purpose" is simply to "expose the system". The power structure is able to gobble

up more rebels than we can supply it with, and with no more than a hint of indigestion. (I think it was J.L. Thomas who admitted that his election to Parliament destroyed utterly his militancy: once he found himself on more or less equal terms with "the boss class" his opinions underwent a remarkable and rapid change. In our own day it would be hard to recognise many former "champions of the people" in their new rôles as trade union leaders, etc.) There is no guarantee that the Abercromby Tenants would not create yet another bureaucratic machine along the lines of a Ward Party apparatus, not from intention but simply in response to the logic of the situation. If anarchists have a rôle to play in this situation, it is more likely to be one of presenting alternatives to the "democratic process". Two such alternatives are (a) self-management of Corporation-owned properties, and (b) housing co-operatives.

On the positive side there is no reason that I can see why anarchists should not involve themselves in the formation and operation of Community Councils, Tenants Associations, etc., since such structures may well be the cornerstones of the next phase of the evolution of society. But it is essential to strive at every stage against the bureaucratisation of these structures. (Why does a Community Council need a chairman?)

The columns of "Insert" are open to the discussion of these (or any other) problems of anarchism. John Cowan and I would be only too ready to step down for a while and let someone else have a say. Why not send your contribution along?

## MERSEYSIDE ANARCHIST MEETINGS

118 High Park Street Liverpool 8  
Every Tuesday at Eight O'Clock

170<sup>A</sup> Lodge Lane Liverpool L8 0QW  
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