Roads To Anarchy

- Anarchists are often more successful at publishing their ideas than putting them into practice. They are not only apolitical but also anti-political.
- The problem is that if they regard the state as evil, any attempt to gain government power or even influence government is corrupting and unhealthy as political power is always oppressive.
- The idea of an anarchist government, party or political is a contradiction in terms so there is no conventional ‘road to anarchy’.

Revolutionary Violence

- In 19th century, leaders tried to rouse the ‘oppressed masses’ to revolt, for example Bakunin leading an organisation and taking part in anarchist uprisings in France and Italy. Also, Malatesta in Italy, Russian Populists and Zapata’s revolutionnaires in Mexico.
- However, they failed, partly because they hoped for spontaneous revolt over organisations. By end of 19th century anarchists focused on syndicalist movements. By 20th century anarchist lost its support to organised communism.
- Some anarchists continued to emphasise revolutionary potential of terrorism and violence: in 1890s and 1970s.
- Anarchists have often been involved in bombings or assassinations to create terror or apprehension. These were normally because of an individual anarchist.
- To anarchists, violence seems to be fair and just as they are a form of revenge and retribution, it originates from the oppression and exploitation of the masses and so it just reflects the violence of everyday society.
- Another advantage of violence demoralizes the ruling classes and raises political consciousness by stimulating the masses to revolt. It demonstrates that the ruling class is weak and defenceless.
- However, it can be said to be counterproductive. Instead of awakening the masses to exploitation, it provokes public horror and outrage. It seems an unpromising way of persuading ruling class to relinquish power, instead they encourage state expansion and strengthening of repression.

Direct Action

- Anarchists have often employed tactics of direct action: ranging from passive resistance to occupation.
- For example, anarcho-syndicalists refuse to engage in regular politics to put pressure on employers by boycotting, striking or sabotaging machines. Similar tactics are used by students to challenge the state and establish their independence.
- Direct action has two advantages. Firstly, it is uncontaminated by processes of government so opposition can be expressed honestly and opposition cannot be ‘managed out of existence’. Secondly, it can be organised with participation, moving away from established parties. This kind of politics was then used in New Social Movements e.g. feminism/gay rights, it is anti-political in its radicality.
- However, direct action has disadvantages. It can damage the political support as the actions will be called ‘extreme’ or ‘irresponsible’. It will get media attention but lose political influence because media will define the group as an ‘outsider’.

Non Violence

- Most anarchists, however see violence as tactically misguided, particularly Godwin and Proudhon.
- These anarchists prefer pacificism, developed by Tolstoy and Gandhi, although neither anarchist they expressed ideas sympathetic to the ideology.
- Tolstoy suggested that modern society is false and corrupt and salvation can be achieved by living by religious principle and returning to simple, rural existence like Russian Peasants, by doing his “no person would employ violence against anyone and under no consideration.”
- Gandhi campaigned against racial discrimination and colonial India, his method was based upon non violent resistance.
- The principle of non-violence has appealed for two reasons. Firstly, it reflects respect for humans as moral and autonomous creatures, it ensures people are treated with compassion and respect. Secondly, to refrain from force even when intimidated/provokes shows the strength of moral purity and conditions.
- However, pacifist anarchists don’t use political activism. They build model societies hoping that the stark contrast between these societies will demonstrate the usefulness of anarchism.

Anarchism in the twenty-first century

- Anarchism has not existed as a significant political movement since the early twentieth century and has failed to provide the basis for political reconstruction in any major society.
- However, it has challenged other political creeds. Highlighting the coercive and destructive nature of political power thereby challenging preference for the state in other ideologies. It has influence over new political thought. For example the New Left’s student activism, anti-colonialism, feminism and environmentalism-the unifying theme of this is liberation to allow freedom and the fact that they all endorse activist style politics. New Right highlight individual freedom and this can only be guaranteed by market competition-anarcho capitalists are similar.
- Anarchists address all types of issues: pollution, consumerism, urban development, inequality, gender relations. Many of these are expressed via New Social Movements which are undoubtedly inspired by anarchists.
- As the world becomes more fragmented and complex it might be that mass politics is dead and so anarchism is better equipped than other political creeds to respond to the challenges of postmodernity.