



Anarchism is the boldest of revolutionary social movements to emerge from the struggle against capitalism—it aims for a world free from all forms of domination and exploitation. But at its heart is a simple and convincing proposition: people know how to live their own lives and organize themselves better than any expert could. Others cynically claim that we need a government to protect us. They claim anarchy is impractical and utopian: it would never work. On the contrary, anarchist practice already has a long record, and has often worked quite well. The histories in this book show that an anarchist society can succeed at enabling all its members to meet their needs and desires.

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## Anarchy Works



development of an imperial military to secure these vital resources. This led not only to environmental devastation but also to warfare and genocide. Similarly in Western Europe, statist environmental protections came at the expense of increased colonial exploitation, which also resulted in genocide.

In smaller-scale societies, the existence of an elite tends to fuel environmental exploitation. The renowned social collapse on Easter Island was caused in large part by the elite, who compelled the society to build statues in their honor. This statue-building complex deforested the island, as large numbers of logs were needed for scaffolding and transportation of the statues, and farmland to feed the laborers came at the expense of more forests. Without forests, soil fertility plummeted, and without food the human population plunged as well. But they didn't just starve or decrease their birth rate—the clan elites warred with one another, knocking down rival statues and carrying out raids that culminated in cannibalism, until nearly the entire society died off.<sup>62</sup>

A decentralized, communal society with a commonly held ecological ethos is the best equipped to prevent environmental destruction. In economies that value local self-sufficiency over trade and production, communities have to deal with the environmental consequences of their own economic behaviors. They cannot pay others to take their garbage or starve so they can have an abundance.

Local control of resources also discourages overpopulation. Studies have shown that when the members of a society can directly see how having too many children will diminish the resources available for everyone, they keep their families within a sustainable limit. But when these localized societies are incorporated into

62 This theory for the fate of Easter Island is convincingly argued in Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, New York, Viking, 2005.

#### 4. Environment

No philosophy or movement for liberation can ignore the connection between human exploitation of the environment and our exploitation of one another, nor can it ignore the suicidal ramifications of industrial society. A free society must forge a respectful and sustainable relationship with its bioregion, on the understanding that humans depend on the health of the entire planet.

##### What's to stop someone from destroying the environment?

Some people oppose capitalism on environmental grounds, but think some sort of state is necessary to prevent ecocide. But the state is itself a tool for the exploitation of nature. Socialist states such as the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China have been among the most ecocidal regimes imaginable. That these two societies never escaped the dynamics of capitalism is itself a feature of the state structure—it necessitates hierarchical, exploitative economic relationships of control and command, and once you start playing that game nothing beats capitalism. However the state does present the possibility of forcibly changing people's behavior on a massive scale, and this power is attractive to some environmentalists. There have been a few states in world history that enforced protective measures domestically, when saving the environment coincided with their strategic interests. One of the foremost is Japan, which halted and reversed deforestation in the archipelago around the Meiji period. But in this case and other cases, domestic environmental protections enforced by the state were coupled with greater exploitation abroad. Japanese society consumed increasing amounts of imported wood, fueling deforestation in other countries and providing an incentive for the



remained in the world, living on a goat-infested island. The plant could go any day. So I got a seed and planted it here. The vine has grown, and although it normally takes twenty years to bloom, this one is blooming after seven. ...If we are to survive, each of us must become *kaitiaki*, which to me is the most important concept in my own Maori culture. We must become caretakers, guardians, trustees, nurturers. In the old days each *whanau*, or family, used to look after a specific piece of terrain. One family might look after a river from a certain rock down to the next bend. And they were the *kaitiaki* of the birds and fish and plants. They knew when it was time to take them to eat, and when it was not. When the birds needed to be protected, the people put a *rahui* on them, which means the birds were temporarily sacred. And some birds were permanently *tapu*, which means they were full-time protected. This protection was so strong that people would die if they broke it. It's that simple. It needed no policing. In their eagerness to unsavage my ancestors Christian missionaries killed the concept of *tapu* along with many others.<sup>64</sup>

Tikopia, a Pacific island settled by Polynesian people, provides a good example of a decentralized, anarchic society that has successfully dealt with life-and-death environmental problems. The island is only 1.8 square miles in area and supports twelve hundred inhabitants—that is, eight hundred people per square mile of farmland. The community has existed sustainably for three thousand years. Tikopia is covered in multi-storied orchard-gardens

64 Bruce Stewart, quoted in Derrick Jensen, *A Language Older than Words*, White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2000, p. 162.

a globalized economy in which most resources and wastes are imported and exported, and scarcity results from seemingly arbitrary price fluctuations rather than the depletion of local resources, populations climb unsustainably, even if more effective forms of contraception are also available.<sup>63</sup> In *Seeing like a State*, James Scott explains how governments enforce “legibility”—a uniformity that enables comprehension from above, in order to control and track subjects. As a result, such societies lose the local knowledge necessary to understand problems and situations.

Capitalism, Christianity, and Western science all share a certain mythology regarding nature, which encourages exploitation and contempt, and views the natural world as dead, mechanical, and existing to satisfy human consumption. This megalomania masquerading as Reason or Divine Truth has revealed itself beyond all doubt to be suicidal. What is needed instead is a culture that respects the natural world as a living, interconnected thing, and understands our place within it. Bruce Stewart, a Maori writer and activist, told an interviewer, pointing to a flowering vine he had planted by his house,

This vine no longer has a name. Our Maori name has been lost, so we'll have to find another. Only one of this plant

63 Eric Alden Smith, Mark Wishnie, “Conservation and Subsistence in Small-Scale Societies,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 29, 2000, pp. 493-524. “As population density and political centralization increases, communities may exceed the size and homogeneity needed for endogenous systems of communal management” (p. 505). The authors also pointed out that colonial and postcolonial interference ended many systems of communal resource management. Bonnie Anna Nardi, “Modes of Explanation in Anthropological Population Theory: Biological Determinism vs. Self-Regulation in Studies of Population Growth in Third World Countries,” *American Anthropologist*, vol. 83, 1981. Nardi points out that as decision-making, society, and identity go from small-scale to a national scale, fertility control loses its effectiveness (p. 40).

that mimic the natural rainforests. At first sight, most of the island appears to be covered in forest, though true rainforests only remain on a few steep parts of the island. Tikopia is small enough that all its inhabitants can become familiar with their entire ecosystem. It is also isolated, so for a long time they could not import resources or export the consequences of their lifestyle. Each of the four clans has a chief, though these chiefs have no coercive powers and play a ceremonial role as the custodians of tradition. Tikopia is among the least socially stratified of the Polynesian islands; for example, the chiefs still have to work and produce their own food. Population control is a common value, and parents feel it is immoral to have more than a certain number of children. In one striking example of the power of these collectively held and reinforced values, around the year 1600 the islanders reached a collective decision to end pig-breeding. They slaughtered all the pigs on the island, even though pig meat was a highly valued food source, because keeping pigs was a major strain on the environment.<sup>65</sup> In a more stratified, hierarchical society, this might have been impossible, because the elite would typically force poorer people to suffer the consequences of their lifestyles rather than give up an esteemed luxury product.<sup>66</sup>

Before colonization and the disastrous arrival of missionaries, population control methods on Tikopia included natural contraception, abortion, and abstinence for younger people—though this was a compassionate celibacy that amounted to a prohibition on reproduction rather than on sex. Tikopians also used other forms of population control, such as infanticide, that many people in other societies would find impermissible, but Tikopia can still provide us

65 Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, New York: Viking, 2005, pp. 292-293

66 For example, the United States and Western Europe, responsible for most of the world's greenhouse gases, are currently forcing hundreds of millions of people to die every year rather than curtailing their car cultures and reducing their emissions.

with a perfectly valid example because with the effectiveness of modern contraception and abortion techniques, no other methods are necessary for a decentralized approach to population control. The most important feature of the Tikopian example is their ethos: their recognition that they lived on an island and resources were limited, so that increasing their population was tantamount to suicide. Other Polynesian island societies ignored that fact and subsequently died off. The planet Earth, in this sense, is also an island; accordingly, we need to develop both global consciousness and localized economies, so we can avoid exceeding the capacity of the land and stay aware of the other living things with whom we share this island.

Today most of the world is not organized into communities that are structured to be sensitive to the limits of the local environment, but it is possible to recreate such communities. There is a growing movement of ecologically sustainable communities, or “ecovillages,” organized on horizontal, non-hierarchical lines, in which groups of people ranging from a dozen to several hundred come together to create anarchic societies with organic, sustainable designs. The construction of these villages maximizes resource efficiency and ecological sustainability, and also cultivates sensitivity to the local environment on a cultural and spiritual level. These ecovillages are at the forefront of developing sustainable technologies. Any alternative community can degenerate into yuppie escapism, and ecovillages are vulnerable to this, but a leading part of the ecovillage movement seeks to develop and spread innovations that are relevant to the world at large rather than to close itself off from the world. To help proliferate ecovillages and adapt them to all regions of the globe, and to facilitate coordination between existing ecovillages, four hundred delegates from forty countries met in Findhorn, Scotland, in 1995 and established the Global Ecovillage Network.

Each ecovillage is a little different, but a few examples can provide an idea of their diversity. The Farm, in rural Tennessee, has three hundred fifty residents. Established in 1971, it contains mulch

gardens, solar-heated showers, a sustainable shiitake mushroom business, straw bale houses, and a center for training people from around the world to build their own ecovillages. Old Bassaia, in Egypt, contains a few hundred residents and has existed for thousands of years. The residents have perfected an ecological and sustainable village design from traditional methods. Old Bassaia now contains a Future Studies center, and they are developing new sustainable technologies like a methane gas producing unit that extracts gases from cow manure to save themselves from having to use scarce firewood. They use the leftover slurry as fertilizer for their fields. Ecotop, near Dusseldorf in Germany, is an entire suburb with hundreds of residents living in several four-story apartment buildings and a few detached homes. The architecture fosters a sense of community and freedom, with a number of communal and private spaces. Between the buildings, in a sort of village center, is a multi-use courtyard/playground/pedestrian zone, as well as community gardens and an abundance of plants and trees. The buildings, which have a completely modern, urban aesthetic, were constructed with natural materials and designed with passive heating and cooling and biological on-site wastewater treatment.

Earthhaven, with about sixty residents, was founded in 1995 in North Carolina by permaculture designers. It is composed of several neighborhood clusters set in the steep Appalachian hills. Most of the land is covered in forest, but the residents recently made the difficult decision to clear some of the forest for gardens so they could come closer to food self-sufficiency rather than exporting the costs of their lifestyle by purchasing food from elsewhere. They talked about it a long time, prepared themselves spiritually, and attempted to clear the land in a respectful way. This sort of attitude, which capitalist ideology would dismiss as sentimental and inefficient, is exactly what could prevent destruction of the environment in an anarchist society.

Also necessary are fierceness and the willingness to take

direct action to defend the environment. On the isthmus of Tehuantepec, in Oaxaca, Mexico, anarchist and anti-authoritarian indigenous people have shown exactly these qualities in protecting the land against a series of threats. Organizations such as the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus, UCIZONI, which includes one hundred communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz, and later the anarchist/Magonista group CIPO-RFM, have fought against the environmentally devastating construction of wind farms, shrimp farms, eucalyptus plantations, and the expropriation of land by the lumber industry. They have also reduced economic pressures to exploit the environment by setting up corn and coffee cooperatives and building schools and clinics. Meanwhile, they have created a network of autonomous community radio stations to educate people about dangers to the environment and inform the surrounding communities about new industrial projects that would destroy more land. In 2001, the indigenous communities defeated the construction of a highway that was part of Plan Puebla Panama (a neoliberal megaproject intended to connect North and South America with transportation infrastructure designed to increase the flow of commodities). During the Zapatista rebellion of 1994, they shut down transportation lines to slow down the movement of troops, and they also blocked highways and shut down government offices to support the 2006 rebellion throughout Oaxaca.

In 1998, the Minnesota Department of Transportation wanted to reroute a highway through a park in Minneapolis along the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. The proposed reroute would destroy an area that contained old trees, a precious oak savanna ecosystem, an ancient freshwater spring, and sites sacred to Native Americans—a vital wild space in the middle of the city that also served as a refuge for many neighbors. Indigenous activists with the American Indian Movement and the Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community came together to



work in coalition with white residents, environmentalists from Earth First!, and anarchists from all over the country to help stop the construction. The result was the Minnehaha Free State, an autonomous zone that became the first and longest-lasting urban anti-road occupation in US history. For a year and a half, hundreds of people occupied the land to prevent the Department of Transportation from cutting down the trees and building the highway, and thousands more supported and visited the Free State. The occupation empowered countless participants, reconnected many Dakota people with their heritage, won the support of many neighbors, created a yearlong autonomous zone and self-organizing community, and significantly delayed the destruction of the area—buying time during which many people were able to discover and enjoy the space in an intimate and spiritual way.

To crush the occupation, the state was forced to resort to a variety of repressive tactics. The people at the encampment were subjected to harassment, surveillance, and infiltration. An army of police officers raided and destroyed the camps repeatedly; tortured, hospitalized, and almost killed people; and carried out over a hundred arrests. In the end, the state cut down the trees and built the highway, but the protestors did manage to save Coldwater Spring, which is a sacred site to the area's indigenous peoples and an important part of the local watershed. The Native participants declared an important spiritual victory.

People throughout Minneapolis who had initially supported the destructive project because of its supposed benefits to the transportation system were won over by the resistance to save the park, and came to oppose the highway. If the decision had been up to them, the highway would not have been built. The Free State created and nurtured coalitions and community bonds that last to this day, shaping new generations of radical community and inspiring similar efforts around the world.

Outside Edinburgh, Scotland, eco-anarchists have had more

obvious success saving a forest. The Bilston Glen anti-roads camp has existed for over seven years as of this writing, drawing the participation of hundreds of people and stopping the construction of a bypass desired by large biotech facilities in the area. To allow people to live there permanently with a lower impact on the forest, and to make it harder for police to evict them, the activists have built houses up in the trees which people occupy year round. The village is certainly low technology, but it is also low impact, and some of the houses are clearly works of love, comfortable enough to be considered permanent homes. The dozen or so inhabitants have also been tending the forest, removing invasive plants and encouraging the growth of native species. The Bilston Glen tree village is just one in a long line of anti-road occupations and ecological direct actions in the UK that create a collective force that makes the state think twice about building new roads or evicting protestors. The village also crosses the line between simply opposing government policy and creating new social relations with the environment. In the course of defending it, dozens of people have made the forest their home, and hundreds more people have personally seen the importance of relating with nature in a respectful way and defending it from Western civilization.

### What about global environmental problems, like climate change?

Anarchists do not yet have experience dealing with global problems because our successes so far have only been local and temporary. Stateless, anarchic societies once covered the world, but this was long before the existence of global environmental problems like those created by capitalism. Today, members of many of these indigenous societies are at the forefront of global resistance to the ecological destruction caused by governments and corporations.