LIVING THE REVOLUTION

Free Unions v. Marriage

Anarchism is a philosophy that gets down to basics; to the natural laws that affect human relationships, and to the primary human needs for freedom and love. Recognizing that freedom in love is as important to people as freedom in community or economic spheres, anarchists advocate for every individual the expression of their emotional and sexual desires free from any coercion on the part of the community or the lover. In other words, a person's personal life is no one's business but his own. But Western society has over the centuries erected a ritual and rule-infested institution to surround the love relationship; an institution that sacrifices the individual to the society. This institution of marriage is actually based on four factors—none of which should have naything to do with a love relationship—; social compulsion, economic motivation, religious coercion, and legal coercion.

Every day of the year, particularly in June, the ritual is re-enacted. The hesitant groom, dressed up in his "monkey suit", wonders how he ever got into this mess. The blushing bride, taken up in the festivities and the luxury of her long flowing gown, giggles with her bridesmaids and dreams of her new home. Their government, their church, and their parents all give their permission to the young couple to begin a sex life and a home together.

Also every day of the year, another ritual is re-enacted time and again. After incurring legal fees and waiting for months, a man and a woman meet before a judge to swear that their marriage is not what it was cracked up to be. They ask the law, and sometimes the church, if they may now go their separate ways. People enter into marriage day after day without ever thinking about what they are doing, who they are, what they want from life, or even what kind of relationship they want.

The social pressure to marry begins at a very early age. The old childhood rhyme, "first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes the baby in the baby carriage", aptly informs the child what is expected of him, and in what order. Young girls are taught by parents and their culture to hope for marriage in their future, and the girls obligingly dream of beautiful weddings. Marriage is simply assumed to be a given in people's lives, based on a centuries-long tradition. When a couple fall in love, they are bombarded by questions about their future plans from family and friends. After all, it is the expected and proper thing to do.

Along with what is expected and proper are the social criteria for whom one marries. People are expected and encouraged to fall in love with only those of the opposite sex from their own race, ethnicity, religion, and class. If people do not abide by these criteria, then the whole structure of society is threatened, or so the argument goes. But if people cannot fall in love with whomever they wish, without incurring the wrath or ostracism of society, then one of the most natural and basic freedoms of human life is denied.

A further inducement to marriage is the economic arrangement it provides. Historically, marriage has been a property relationship that was sanctioned and protected by the church and the state. The husband essentially bought his wife from her father. Marriage was a transaction of goods between two men. Such rituals as the wedding ring, and the father giving away the bride are leftovers of these old property arrangements. Once married, the husband wielded complete control over his wife, a control that was supported legally with laws that forbade divorce, gave the husband the only legal right to their children, and even gave the husband the legal right to murder his wife if he found her with a lover.

In many marriages today the husband continues to dominate the wife economically, psychologically, emotionally, sexually, and physically. An outrageous number of women likewise continue to accept this arrangement, believing that they are sup-

posed to be the subservient half of the marriage. But among more so-called modern marriages, the power in the relationship is now distributed more equally. These marriages have become essentially a joint property venture in which the husband and wife own each other. In these "you are mine, and I am yours, and we are one" marriages, possession is still the key factor; it is simply shared a little more evenly.

Religious coercion also continues to interfere in personal relationships. Religious demands force people who wish to separate to remain together. Organized religions reinforce prejudices and fears about certain types of relationships—such as homosexual and inter-racial—that have been declared unnatural by

celibate old men. Religions also reinforce traditional values towards birth control and abortion, and towards the husband/wife relationship.

Ultimately, every marriage of whatever kind is governed by the law. Marriage binds two people together in a legal contract. As divorce rates demonstrate, that legal commitment does not keep the people together, it only creates unnecessary legal hassles if a couple wishes to part.

Even if a couple determined between themselves that their relationship would be a free one, once they marry they not only come under the authority of the state, they also accept an institution that is tainted by all of the aforementioned ills. All of the four factors discussed combine to make the institution of marriage one that minimizes the freedom of the two people and fetters their relationship with false notions of security and propriety. What is needed is a new kind of relationship based on freedom and individuality.

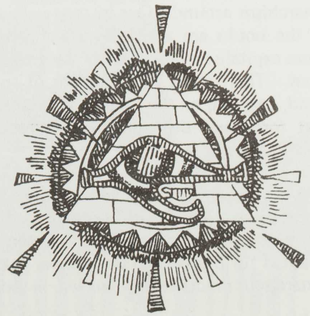
Most people see living together as either a financial arrangement of convenience, as a wild fling before settling down, or as a trial period before marriage. But for anarchists, living together in a "free union" is a much-preferred alternative to the restrictive institution of marriage. For a hundred years now anarchists have been living together in free unions, unfettered by church, state, or community.

Anarchists realize that love relationships are first, foremost, and only personal. Why should the state have any say in, or power over, a love relationship? If you do not recognize the authority of government to tax, to draft, or even to exist, then certainly you would not recognize the authority of government in your personal relationships. Likewise neither religious nor social pressure should succeed in exerting authority over a love relationship.

The only real commitment in a love relationship is the personal commitment worked out between the people concerned. Love offers no guarantees. No one can know how long a relationship will last. The closest to a guarantee a couple can have is assurance in their love for each other and confidence that it will last for awhile. But people are often insecure and need something solid and stationary to grasp at, so they grasp at the security of a marriage license. But the marriage is only a false security. If people really believed in their love for each other, then they would not need to put a lock and key on it.

In an anarchist free union, the relationship is never stifled by false security, but remains spontaneous and ever-changing. Just listen to the words "they are married" v. "they are living together." The first, in the past tense, speaks of a settled, defined, never changing, never growing relationship—the deed has been done. The second, in the present tense, speaks of an ongoing process, of a relationship that is always in the present—in reality. The two people come together as individuals, and they remain separate individuals. Secure in themselves and respecting the individuality of each other, neither person attempts to dominate, neither attempts to become dependent, nor do they lose their individuality for the sake of the greater couple. They are together because of their love for each other, and for none of the extraneous reasons that bind loveless marriages. Since their bond is only their personal commitment, anarchist free lovers, out of absolute necessity (besides desire), remain honest and open in their relationship. The children from an anarchist free union have as good a chance, if not better, for a happy family life as any other children.

The relationship lasts as long as the personal commitment lasts. Unhindered by church, state, or social convention, the two people rule their own lives. This is not to say that a broken free union is not painful. But since the individuals have remained individuals, each with a full life, the break-up would not be compounded by the additional suffering of a dependent individual trying to fend for herself/himself for the first time. (By the way, many anarchist free unions have lasted until death, while other anarchists have been involved in a succession of free unions.)

Free unions are a consoling way to live the revolution. Even though many anarchists may have to put up with governmental force, and coercion in the workplace, at least at home, in one's personal relationships one can be free.

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