

of the rich, characteristically, are accorded very special places in the regimes of the right, or of conservatives. Also, there is a great deference to stability and a preference for it rather than change — all other things being equal. Caution might be the watchword toward the center of this right-wing scale, simply a go-slow attitude. That is, admittedly, a long way from the far right and dictatorship, but it is a way that can and should be measured on a straight line. The natural preference for law and order that seems such a worthwhile and innocent conservative preference is from a political tradition that came to us from kings and emperors, not from ancient democracy.

“This hardly means that every conservative, if pressed, will go farther and farther right until embracing absolute dictatorship or monarchy. Far from it. It does mean to suggest only that the ghosts of royal power whisper in the conservative tradition.

“The left shows similar gradations. The farthest left you can go, historically at any rate, is anarchism — the total opposition to *any* institutionalized power, a state of completely voluntary social organization in which people would establish their ways of life in small, consenting groups, and cooperate with others as they see fit.

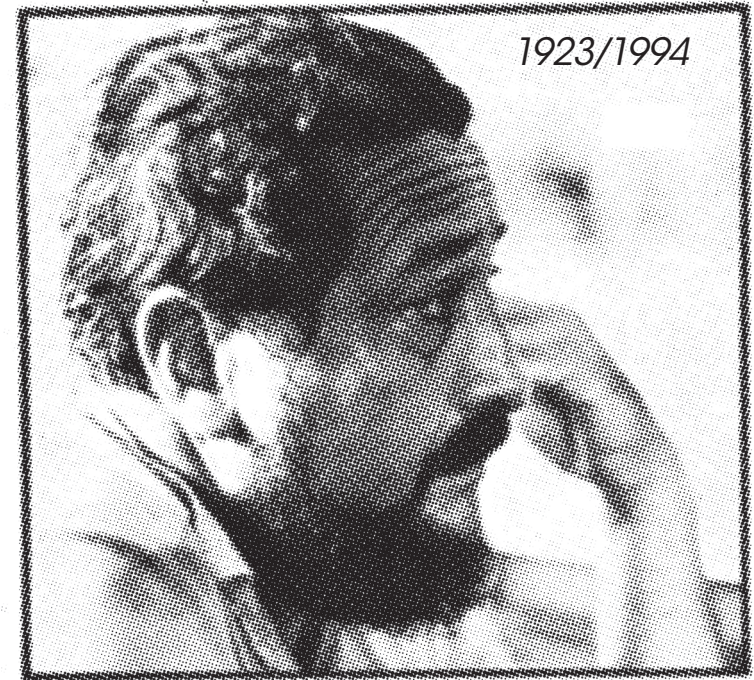
“The attitude on that farthest left toward law and order was summed up by an early French anarchist, Proudhon, who said that ‘order is the daughter of and not the mother of liberty.’ Let people be absolutely free, says this farthest of the far, far left (the left that Communism regularly denounces as *too* left; Lenin called it ‘infantile left’). If they are free they will be decent, but they never can be decent until they are free. Concentrated power, bureaucracy, et cetera, will doom that decency. A bit further along the left line there might be some agreement or at least sympathy with this left libertarianism but, it would be said, there are practical and immediate reasons for putting off that sort of liberty. People just aren’t quite ready for it. Roughly, that’s the position of the Communist Party today..

“At any rate, at some point on the spectrum there is the great modern American liberal position. Through a series of unfortunate but certainly understandable distortions of political terminology, the liberal position has come to be known as a left-wing position. Actually, it lies right alongside the conservative tradition, down toward the middle of the line, but decidedly, I think, to the right of its center. Liberals believe in concentrated power — in the hands of liberals, the supposedly educated and genteel elite. They believe in concentrating that power as heavily and effectively as possible. They believe in great size of enterprise, whether corporate or political, and have a great and profound disdain for the homely and the local. They think nationally but they also think globally and now even intergalactically. Actually, because they believe in far more authoritarian rule than a lot of conservatives, it probably would be best to say that liberals lie next to but actually to the *right* of many conservatives.”

Dear America (1975) by Karl Hess

Prepared by the
Tulsa Alliance of the Libertarian Left
for the
Center for a Stateless Society
c4ss.org
and for
Corvus Editions
corvusdistribution.org

Karl Hess



"I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice! And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!" – *Karl Hess, for Barry Goldwater; attribution to Cicero.*

Anarchism without Hyphens & the Left/Right spectrum

Anarchism without Hyphens

There is only one kind of anarchist. Not two. Just one. An anarchist, the only kind, as defined by the long tradition and literature of the position itself, is a person in opposition to authority imposed through the hierarchical power of the state. The only expansion of this that seems to me reasonable is to say that an anarchist stands in opposition to any imposed authority. An anarchist is a voluntarist.

Now, beyond that, anarchists also are people and, as such, contain the billion-faceted varieties of human reference. Some are anarchists who march, voluntarily, to the Cross of Christ. Some are anarchists who flock, voluntarily, to the communes of beloved, inspirational father figures. Some are anarchists who seek to establish the syndics of voluntary industrial production. Some are anarchists who voluntarily seek to establish the rural production of the kibbutzim. Some are anarchists who, voluntarily, seek to disestablish everything including their own association with other people; the hermits. Some are anarchists who will deal, voluntarily, only in gold, will never co-operate, and swirl their capes. Some are anarchists who, voluntarily, worship the sun and its energy, build domes, eat only vegetables, and play the dulcimer. Some are anarchists who worship the power of algorithms, play strange games, and infiltrate strange temples. Some are anarchists who see only the stars. Some are anarchists who see only the mud.

They spring from a single seed, no matter the flowering of their ideas. The seed is liberty. And that is all it is. It is not a socialist seed. It is not a capitalist seed. It is not a mystical seed. It is not a determinist seed. It is simply a statement. *We can* be free. After that it's all choice and chance.

Anarchism, liberty, does not tell you a thing about how free people will behave or what arrangements they will make. It simply says that people have the capacity to make the arrangements.

Anarchism is not normative. It does not say how to be free. It says only that freedom, liberty, can exist.

Recently, in a libertarian journal, I read the statement that libertarianism is an ideological movement. It may well be. In a concept of freedom it, they, you, or we, anyone, has the liberty to engage in ideology or anything else that does not coerce others, denying their liberty. But anarchism is not an ideological movement. It is an ideological statement. It says that all people have a capacity for liberty. It says that all anarchists want liberty. And then it is silent. After the pause of that silence, anarchists then mount the stages of their own communities and history and proclaim *their*, not anarchism's, ideologies—they say how they, how they as anarchists, will make arrangements, describe events, celebrate life, work.

Anarchism is the hammer-idea, smashing the chains. Liberty is what results and, in liberty, everything else is up to people and *their* ideologies. It is not up to THE ideology. Anarchism says, in effect, there is no such upper case, dominating ideology. It says that people who live in liberty make their own histories and their own deals with and within it.

A person who describes a world in which everyone must or should behave in a single way, marching to a single way, marching to a single drummer, is simply not an anarchist. A person who says that they prefer this way, even wishing that all would prefer that way, but who then says that all must decide, may certainly be an anarchist. Probably is.

Liberty is liberty. Anarchism is anarchism. Neither is Swiss cheese or anything else. They are not property. They are not copyrighted. They are old, available ideas, part of human culture. They may *be* hyphenated but they are not in fact hyphen-

ated. They exist on their own. People add hyphens, and supplemental ideologies.

I am an anarchist. I need to know that, and you should know it. After that, I am a writer and a welder who lives in a certain place, by certain lights, and with certain people. And that you may know also. But there is no hyphen after the anarchist.

Liberty, finally, is not a box into which people are to be forced. Liberty is a space in which people may live. It does not tell you how they will live. It says, eternally, only that we *can*.

the dandelion, Spring 1980 by Karl Hess

the Left/Right spectrum

“My own notion of politics is that it follows a straight line rather than a circle. The straight line stretches from the far right where (historically) we find monarchy, absolute dictatorships, and other forms of absolutely authoritarian rule. On the far right, law and order means the law of the ruler and the order that serves the interest of that ruler, usually the orderliness of drone workers, submissive students, elders either totally cowed into loyalty or totally indoctrinated and trained into that loyalty. Both Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler operated right-wing regimes, politically, despite the trappings of socialism with which both adorned their regimes. Huey Long, when governor-boss of Louisiana, was moving toward a truly right-wing regime, also adorned with many trappings of socialism (particularly public works and welfare) but held together not by social benefits but by a strong police force and a steady flow of money to subsidize and befriend businessmen.

An American President could be said to move toward the right to the extent that he tended to make absolutely unilateral political decisions, with no reference to Congress, for instance, or to the people generally, and when the legitimacy of the regime was supported or made real more by sheer force, say of police power, than by voluntary allegiance from the people generally. Such a regime, also, would be likely to suppress or to swallow up potentially competing centers of power such as trade unions. Major financial interests, however, if Adolf Hitler's relations with industry, for example, can be considered instructive, would be bought off, rather than fought off, with fat contracts and a continuing opportunity to enrich their owners. Joseph Stalin, of course, had no problem with anything such as independent trade unions or business, since both had been killed off earlier.

“The *overall* characteristic of a right-wing regime, no matter the details of difference between this one and that one, is that it reflects the concentration of power in the fewest practical hands.

“Power, concentrated in few hands, is the dominant historic characteristic of what most people, in most times, have considered the political and economic right wing.

“The far left, as far as you can get away from the right, would logically represent the opposite tendency and, in fact, has done just that throughout history. The left has been the side of politics and economics that opposes the concentration of power and wealth and, instead, advocates and works toward the distribution of power into the maximum number of hands.

“Just as the scale along this line would show gradations of the right, so would it show gradations of the left.

“Before getting to a far-right monarchy or dictatorship, there are many intermediate right-wing positions. Some are called conservative.

“Somewhere along the line, for instance, a certain concentration of power, particularly economic power, would be acceptable in the name of tradition. The children