



Call for Papers

Burning the Ballot: Feminism Meets Anarchy

A Special Issue of *Coils of the Serpent: Journal for the Study of Contemporary Power*

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Anarchism's engagement with the question of gender is at once ambiguous and contradictory. Historically, the anarchist response to the "woman/sex question" was mixed. During the period of 'classical anarchism' (1840-1939), women took on active roles in anarchist movements – they were active in anarchist organizations, publications, and projects across the globe. They took part in uprisings, rebellions, and revolutions, as well as in the work of day-to-day anarchist organizing, propaganda, and more. While many (though not all) rejected the label of feminist, they nonetheless spoke out against sexual subordination and called for the emancipation of women with the overthrow of all forms of social, political, and economic hierarchy. At the same time, many others were at best ambivalent to the idea of sexual equality and at worst outright hostile to it. Frequently credited as the founding father of anarchism, Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) was an outright misogynist who spoke out against the idea that women could (or should) ever be anything other than wives and mothers, and claimed that the only option available to women outside of the family was prostitution. Sonn in his study of the early anarchist movement in France describes the pervasiveness of an "anarchist antifeminism" (2005: 32). Similarly, Gemie in his historical survey of anarchist political culture across North America and Europe notes the prevalence of "anarcho-sexism" (1996: 417). During the period of 'new anarchism' (1940-1990), emphasis on the politics of everyday life grew and an explicitly feminist strand of anarchism emerged. Under the banner of anarcha-feminism, efforts were made to integrate radical feminist and gay liberation ideas into anarchist movements. Most recently, the period of 'contemporary/post-anarchism' (1990-present) has been marked by an emphasis on incorporating queer struggles and developing a distinctly queer anarchism. Against this backdrop, anarchism's relationship to feminism has remained strained.

From the so-called first-wave of feminism until our present moment, anarchists have been considered both ally and adversary. In the early days of the women's movement, some anarchists were active participants and a few even claimed the feminist label. Chinese anarchist He-Yin Zhen (1884-1920) exerted considerable influence and wrote extensively on women's liberation. She spoke out against prominent male intellectuals, critiqued the nationalism of a burgeoning Chinese feminism, and discussed feminist struggle as "the beginning and outcome of a total social revolution that would abolish the state and private property to bring about true social equality and the end to all social hierarchies" (Liu et al. 2013: 7). In Puerto Rico, Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922) was a pivotal figure in both anarchist and feminist movements

respectively. She organized women workers, published pamphlets and books on gender equality, and infamously made waves when she donned a pair of trousers to stroll the streets of Havana, becoming “the first Puerto Rican woman to wear pants in public” (Romeu Toro 2013: 178). In America, Voltarine de Cleyre (1866-1912) developed an anarchism that was inextricably connected to an analysis of sexual inequality. She publicly identified as a feminist, and in her own words became an anarchist because of her “anger at the institutions set up by men” and her “disgust with the cramped, subordinated circle provided for women” (cited in Marsh 1978: 540). While some anarchist women openly allied themselves with feminists, many more vehemently rejected the label and were at times hostile to the women’s movement. Somewhat ironically, one of the few anarchist women to be given considerable attention by feminists – Emma Goldman – was intensely critical of the women’s movement during her lifetime. While Goldman centered considerations of gender and sexuality in much of her work and contributed to related discussions in both anarchist circles and society at large, she frequently criticized feminists’ pursuit of suffrage and more or less saw the women’s movement as a bourgeois endeavor incompatible with revolution.

In the years following the ‘classical period’ of Goldman’s time, particularly over the last 40 years, it has become more and more common for anarchists to ask: what can anarchism learn from feminism? The political culture, language, and practice of contemporary anarchism (while by no means free from sexism, queerphobia, or transmisogyny) draws from and is influenced by the theories and practices of feminists. Further, there is also a growing chorus of anarchists arguing for deeper engagement with Indigenous feminisms and political interventions, and their particular forms of resistance to settler colonialism, capitalism, the state and patriarchy (Warburton 2016). Given the ongoing nature of settler colonial dispossession in places like so-called ‘North America’, this raises some questions as to how to situate anarchism and feminism in such a context. Recent work on anarchy-Indigenism takes up some of these questions and explores the ways that exchange and dialogue can occur between anarchism, Indigenous resistance/resurgence practices and feminism (see e.g. Hall 2016; Affinities 2011).

However, the flip-side to anarchism’s interest in feminism is largely not true and it is rare for feminists to ask: what can feminism learn from anarchism? Anarchism and by extension anarchists are rarely included in feminist discourse. Contrary to those who see anarchism and feminism as an obvious match (Kornegger 2002), Ferguson notes that “anarchism has had trouble finding its place in feminism” and “a steady diet of demonization and ridicule of anarchy has not encouraged historians of feminism to take anarchism seriously” (2021). At the same time, Warburton (2016) cautions, however, that anarchists might need to confront the difficult question of what, if anything, anarchism might bring to Indigenous feminism in particular, given Indigenous feminism’s own theorizations and oppositions to the state and domination. The potential for more direct anarchist influences on feminism remains a question that needs more explicit discussion. All feminisms, after all, are not created equal. This Special Issue of *Coils of the Serpent* sets out from the premise that despite its shortcomings, anarchism has much to offer feminism and is worth being taken seriously and explored in greater detail.

We invite contributions on topics such as (but not limited to):

- Anarchist contributions to anti-carceral feminism
- Anarcha-feminism in the age of girlboss culture
- Anarchist critiques of the state and/or hierarchy and feminist engagements with electoral politics
- Anarchist analyses of institutionalization, cooptation, and/or recuperation in relation to feminism
- Gender abolition, anarchist struggle, and feminist futures
- Anarchist perspectives on the politics and pitfalls of “inclusion” and/or “representation”
- Women, queers, and trans radicals in anarchist history
- Anarchist theorizations of gender, struggle, and liberation
- Anarchism, feminism and the ongoing context of settler colonialism
- Gender struggle, illegality, and anarchism
- Discussions of the body, sexuality, and/or desire within anarchism
- Sex work and other types of gendered labour and anarchism
- Gender, militancy, and street politics
- Intersections and exchanges between anarchist, Indigenous, Black and Women of Colour feminisms
- Anarchy 101 for feminists
- Anarchist approaches to struggles for reproductive justice
- Prefigurative and everyday practices of feminism and their influence/importance within anarchist cultures of resistance

Please send an abstract of approximately 500 words and a short bio to the editors Tammy Kovich and Adam Lewis (tkovich-research@riseup.net and adamlewis.research@gmail.com) by **1 December 2021**. Abstracts should include a title, topic outline, and information on the kind of text (essay, statement, scholarly article) as well as the approximate length of the planned text. Submissions can be in the form of a traditional journal article, but this is not a requirement. Submissions can also be more activist-oriented, of a personal nature, and/or experimental. The editors will get back to you by **1 January 2022**, and full articles will be due **1 June 2022**. Please read the journal’s submission guidelines: <https://coilsoftheserpent.org/submissions/>

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