

The Unabomber

Is he an anarchist?

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A reclusive eccentric called Theodore Kaczynski is in custody in Montana. As we go to press, he is charged only with possession of ‘an unauthorised weapon’, a collection of junk alleged to be the makings of a bomb. His arrest, however, was reported throughout the international news media, because he is suspected of being the ‘Unabomber’, the terrorist who mailed and planted sixteen bombs in seventeen years, killing three and injuring more than twenty persons in the United States. Wealthier news media will report and comment on the case as it develops. We do not propose to speculate on whether Mr Kaczynski is the Unabomber, but to discuss whether the Unabomber, whoever that may be, is an anarchist.

Anarchists are, by definition, opposed to people dominating other people by means of threats, especially if the coercive relationship is institutionalised. That is to say, they are opposed to government in all its forms. They may sometimes use one coercive institution against another, for instance the law courts against over-active police, but this is always a matter of expediency, never of principle. The only kinds of society with which anarchists can be content are those where nobody is the boss, and all relationships are on the basis of voluntary cooperation. But the term Anarchist’ is often misapplied to mean anyone who uses illegal, secretive, violent means in pursuit of any social objective, however authoritarian.

A BBC radio commentator, one 5th November, described Guy Fawkes as an anarchist’. But the objective of Guy Fawkes and his associates was to restore Roman Catholicism. and the old custom of suppressing heresy by burning people.

Even a supposedly serious work, the Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, describes Auguste Blanqui as a precursor of anarchism, and says Bakunin “continued the Blanqui line”, although Blanqui advocated the seizure and use of coercive power, not its abolition. The Unabomber was described in some newspapers as an anarchist his, her or their motives and opinions. These opinions are now manifest. In April 1995, after seventeen years of unclaimed bombings, “the terrorist group FC” wrote to the press giving sufficient evidence for himself, herself or themselves to be confirmed as the Unabomber. As the price of discontinuing the bombs, the letter demanded that a manifesto of 232 numbered, long-winded paragraphs should be published in the New York Times and the Washington Post. This was done, and the full text has since been published as a pamphlet by our contemporary Green Anarchist.

The manifesto denounces technology:

130. Technology advances with great rapidity and threatens freedom at many different points at the same time (crowding, rules and regulations, increasing dependence of individuals on large organisations, propaganda and other psychological techniques. genetic engineering. invasion of privacy through surveillance devices and computer, etc.. To hold back any ONE of the threat to freedom would require a long different [sic; misprint for difficult?] social struggle. Those who want to protect freedom are overwhelmed by the sheer number of new attacks and the rapidity with which

they develop, hence they become pathetic and no longer resist. To fight each of the threat separately would be futile. Success can be hoped for only by fighting the technological system as a whole; but that is revolution not reform.

Mr Kaczynski eschews technology, dwelling in a shack without electricity or water, and riding a bicycle (a triumph of industrial technology which some cyclists like to imagine is primitive). The Unabomber denounces technology but uses it- sophisticated electrical equipment in the preparation of bombs, and something more sophisticated than a bicycle for moving bombs around the United States. A problem for those preparing the case against Mr Kaczynski will be to show that, while living low-tech, he had access to high- tech when it suited him. Dislike of technology is compatible with anarchism. A valued contributor to Freedom enjoys the occasional rant against technology, 'the scientists' and 'progress'. But delight in technology is also compatible with anarchism (if less fashionable), and the keenest opponents of technology are authoritarian 'eco-fascists'. An anti-technology stance is not essential to anarchism, and does not imply anarchism. Nor does the use of home-made bombs, for which the Unabomber presents an interesting rationale:

96... Take us (FC) for example. If we had never done anything violent and had submitted the present writings to a publisher, they probably would not have been accepted. If they had been accepted and published, they probably would not have attracted many readers, because it's more fun to watch the entertainment put out by the media than to read a sober essay. Even if these writings had many readers, most of these readers would soon have forgotten what they read as their minds were flooded by the mass of material to which the media exposes them. In order to get our message before the public with some chance of making a lasting impression, we had to kill people.

Some anarchists have used bombs, but most would rather remain unheard than kill people to attract attention. The majority of murderous fanatics are authoritarians. The obvious way to find out whether the Unabomber is an anarchist is to search the Manifesto for references to government. And in fact we need read only paragraph 4 of 232 to find the information we require:

4. We therefore advocate a revolution against the industrial system ... This is not to be a POLITICAL revolution. Its object will be to overthrow not governments but the economic and technological basis of the present society.

Admirably clear. The Unabomber is not an anarchist. Since we have no intention of killing anyone to emphasise our point, it will probably not be widely noticed. But for what it is worth, we call upon the media to stop referring to the Unabomber as an 'anti-tech anarchist'. 'Anti-tech' is true, 'anarchist' is false.

The Ted K Archive

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