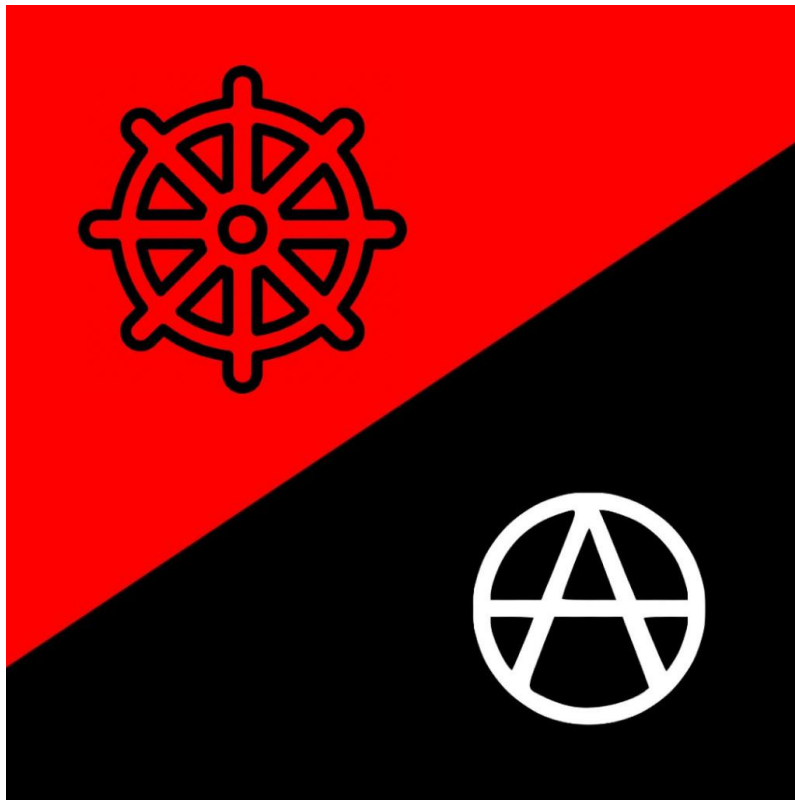


Buddhist Anarchists for Myanmar

To ensure that victory is achieved and peace is lasting, revolutionaries, especially those who are Buddhists, should consider these ideas.

Wingulls



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Myanmar, also known as Burma: It is one of the world's most devout Buddhist nations as well as one of the world's most violent, home to the longest ongoing civil war in modern history. It is the birthplace of the modern insight meditation movement, which has planted roots all around the globe, spread the Dhamma and benefitted millions of lives at home and abroad. The insight meditation movement is itself a child of anti-colonial struggle, bringing true Dhamma to the people in order to protect the teachings in the face of Christian missionaries and British colonial influence. After winning independence from the colonizers and the military government multiple times, the people of Myanmar are once again fighting for dear life after the military coup which deposed the civilian government.

The current movement is winning. It is winning because it is very decentralized, leaderless and anti-authoritarian and employs a diversity of tactics to resisting the regime. The military can beat, kill, imprison and terrorize the people, but they cannot terrorize a leaderless, decentralized movement. The movement is also hard to destroy because it uses many tactics to meet its goals and supports itself. While the youth are risking their lives protesting in the streets, a massive movement of mutual aid, from trash collection to COVID relief to supporting government workers on strike, has taken form. Society is organizing itself in defense against the government's terrorism, and it is running things better than a corrupt government ruled by elites ever has or could.

Anarchism is a political philosophy which opposes domination and violence in society. Anarchists believe that the greatest sources of violence in the world are governments, with their militaries, police, prisons and discriminatory laws, and capitalism, which exploits, abuses and commodifies people, forcing them to work for a wage just to survive and giving the greatest benefits to those who work the least. The goal of anarchists is to bring about a liberated society through the process of social revolution. They advocate doing this by educating themselves and others to understand the situation they live in, imagining how to change it, and then organizing in social movements to challenge oppressive systems, so that they can be replaced with a more peaceful and just way of governing ourselves and making a living.

Buddhist anarchists are anarchists who believe that living according to anarchist values and advocating for anarchist goals is the best way to live according to the ethical prescriptions of the Buddha: to practice non-violence, generosity, compassion and right livelihood. Some Buddhist anarchists may also pray or meditate in order to realize the truths the Buddha taught and win their own liberation. Buddhist anarchists believe that complying with the unjust rules of society makes it almost impossible to follow the Buddha's Dhamma. Just to survive in this world we have to exploit, to cheat, to steal, to gain at someone else's expense, and thus suffer the negative consequences of our actions. But Buddhist anarchists also believe that we can and must change the world so that every single person is free to work out his or her kamma and his or her liberation. Under the current system very few people have the time, the money or the education to lead an ethical life, much less pursue liberation through intensive meditation practice. The world must be changed for the Dhamma to live. We cannot put this off until a future life or force this responsibility on others. Our freedom is interdependent. As the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin once wrote, ***"Only the freedom of others makes me truly free, in such a way that, the more numerous are the free men that surround me, and the more extensive and broad their freedom, the greater and deeper will become my freedom. [...] My personal freedom thus confirmed by the freedom of all extends to infinity."***

Some proposals for Buddhist Anarchists:

- The Buddhist Sangha must resist the corrupting influence of the government. For the preservation of the true Buddha Dhamma, Buddhists must insist on a firm separation of Sangha and State, demanding that the government not institute a state religion, and ultimately must be abolished. If this is not done, the sangha will continue to be corrupted by and complicit in the violence of the government and the people will lose their faith in true Dhamma.
- Stop persecution of religious and ethnic minorities by Buddhist leaders and government. Educate and organize the people against racism and xenophobic propaganda. Work towards unity between progressive Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and Atheists to resist the regime. Anarchists have consistently been some of the most outspoken against religious and ethnic hatred.
- Defund, disarm and disband the Military and Police. As long as these institutions of violence exist, conflicts over power will continue and the people will not be free to govern themselves peacefully. "They call the

people's self-defence violence, but they call their violence the law." From Minneapolis to Yangon, A.C.A.B. (All Cops are Bastards).

- The protest movement is most successful when it is decentralized: leaders may arise, but leaders can easily become politicians who act for only their own benefit. Leaders must come from the grassroots and stay with the grassroots. By joining or compromising with the state, they make the movement weaker by redirecting people's energy to preserving the status quo. By investing too much hope in single leaders, the movement becomes vulnerable to repression. The government only has to kill, arrest or silence enough of the leaders for the movement to become uncoordinated and fragmented. The way the leaderless protests have been fighting now, from the streets to the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), is what has allowed them to survive such severe repression.
- The Sangha (monastics and laypeople) must make an effort to start mutual aid programs for people struggling during and after the revolution and redistribute its excess wealth to the people. When the Sangha becomes too separate from the people and obsessed with gathering wealth and donations without giving anything in return, the people lose faith and the true dharma is lost. Laypeople and monastics should keep in mind that making merit is an act of generosity and social solidarity for the collective good, not just for one's own benefit or for one's family. The merit earned by sharing wealth and practicing the true Dhamma is vastly greater than merit earned in self-centered giving and hoarding.
- The struggle for democracy must be for a true democracy and against the state. The endless cycle of coups and elections can only be ended by rejecting the quest for control of the state and giving all power back to the people themselves. Instead of electing members of the elite classes to represent them, the people can organize communes, where each person has a vote that counts equally, from the village level up to the town, the district, and the nation to govern themselves and realize actual liberation and peace. This way, most conflicts can be solved with dialogue not violence, and there will be no need for a central military or police force to protect the people, who are well fed, supplied and capable of protecting themselves. The anarchist-inspired system of Democratic Confederalism adopted by the people of Rojava, a region in Syria which has been plagued by similar conflicts since the end of colonization, might be a helpful example for ending inter-ethnic conflict and supplant the government's tyranny with democratic autonomy for all minorities.
- Buddhist anarchists demand the end of capitalism and economic exploitation. One cannot live a right livelihood by exploiting others' labour, be it a worker in a field, a factory or an office, or a wife, daughter or mother's labor in the home. Only when every person has their needs met can we freely contribute our work to society as equals. Workers should organize labor unions and cooperatives, strike for better treatment and in protest of the regime along with the rest of society. Anarchists advocate that workers launch a General Strike of all workers, stopping production, transportation, administration and communication industries to paralyze the system non-violently topple the government. Ordinary soldiers are also exploited by their superiors, and should be encouraged to defect and disobey orders from their commanders and instead protect and side with the people.

Buddhist anarchists support the people's movement by advocating for particular methods of protest and organization: direct action, direct democracy, direct insight, education, mutual-aid, solidarity, and non-violence.

- Direct action: taking action to win freedom without the approval of governments, ministers, representatives or religious higher-ups. Includes strikes such as the CDM movement, protests, blockades, occupations and other disruptive activities.
- Direct democracy: Every single person gets an equal say in political decisions and no person or group gets to dictate policy for another. Decisions are made from the bottom up centering those most affected by them.
- Direct insight: Using Buddhist meditation and study to understand one's own mind. By directly perceiving one's own suffering and seeing through delusions, Buddhist anarchists are able to bring deep wisdom and

compassion from their own hearts and into the streets. Meditation practice can help reduce the stress of protesting and organizing and help activists maintain a peaceful mind in the midst of struggle.

- Education: Buddhist anarchists can form study groups to analyze their situation, expand their knowledge, define their political ideas and plan their liberation. This is more than just reading books or practicing Dhamma. As a study group Buddhist anarchists can bring new ideas, debate and teach one another while developing a collective theory which is appropriate for their situation. These study groups can also go on to form the core of social organizations, media collectives, mutual aid societies, feminist collectives, unions, protest medics or meditation groups and can bring in new members and help them learn, free their minds and radicalize themselves.
- Mutual aid: a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions without relying on governments, large charities or wealthy donors. It is also very much like the Buddha's principle of *dana*, or generosity, one of the great perfections to be cultivated on the way to enlightenment.
- Solidarity: an injury to one is an injury to all. We are all bound up in each other's suffering. We are all bound up in each other's liberation. The people must see past their divisions and unite around common needs and ideals. When one workplace goes on strike, everyone else joins in. When one town rises up in protest, the whole country joins in. When anarchists in one part of the world are struggling, anarchists everywhere support them.
- Federalism: Rather than having orders handed down from a central organization, the people can join together as autonomous groups and form democratic federations to make decisions and support each other while respecting each group and person's freedom. Creating popular democratic organizations is essential to countering the organized force of the state. Small groups that remain disunited will not be able to overcome in the long run.
- Non-violence: Buddhist anarchists refrain from taking life, and center their activities in compassion for all beings. But non-violence does not mean being polite. Buddhist anarchists do not reject the use of non-lethal force in cases of self-defense against oppression, and advocate strategic disruption and sabotage of private and state property, such as police vehicles, weapons, industrial machinery, roads, government buildings and so on. They oppose police brutality, ethnic violence, domestic violence and try to create a society which reduces violence at all levels of organization. The sangha's historic commitment to non-violence can inspire the people as a whole to reject the violence of the regime and build a peaceful society.

From abroad we see your movement doing all of these things and more. We are deeply inspired by your efforts and wish to support you however we can.

These are just a few suggestions. The purpose of anarchism is not to propagate itself and indoctrinate people. Its purpose is to help social movements to achieve their own goals for liberation. So if anything here is helpful, please take it. If not, please feel free to leave it. All we wish for is your victory and freedom. We are writing from the international anarchist and Buddhist communities to the people of Myanmar. We are not there in the streets with you, but we wish to extend our warmest greetings of solidarity and support for your movement. Your struggle is an example to the whole world, and you aren't fighting alone. We hope that these ideas will be encouraging and help you develop a living Buddhist anarchism in Myanmar which is relevant to your needs in this urgent time. If you read this and have suggestions, requests or criticisms please contact us and if you liked it make sure to share it with a friend.

We call on other international anarchists and engaged Buddhists to support the people's struggle in Myanmar with material donations, writing and solidarity actions in protest of the regime.

In solidarity with the revolution. May all beings everywhere be free.

In solidarity,
An American Buddhist Anarchist

For more resources, please see <https://sea.theanarchistlibrary.org/> for southeast asian anarchist texts, and <https://theanarchistlibrary.org> for english language texts.

Support Yangon Food Not Bombs: <https://insightmyanmar.org/blog/2021/4/6/they-drop-bombs-you-give-foo>

The Insight Myanmar podcast has been doing an excellent job of interviewing people directly involved in the movement, collecting donations, and getting the information out to an international audience.

Other fundraiser links, from strike support to refugee aid: <https://www.isupportmyanmar.com/>

Myanmar news: Online Burma/Myanmar Library

Recommended watching: *My Buddha is Punk* (Film proceeds go to Yangon Food Not Bombs)

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