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Anarchism in America

directed by Pieter Jan Brugge

informative combo DVD reveals anarchy isn't what you think it is

Anarchism in America is a DVD collection of two documentaries made by filmmakers Steven Fishler and Joel Sucher. The team studied with Martin Scorsese in 1969 and has since made a number of documentaries that have won both Emmy and Guggenheim awards. The DVD includes *Anarchism In America* and *The Free Voice of Labor*.

To say these two documentaries are fascinating would do them no justice. I was absolutely glued to the television during them, a rarity for me as you may have guessed. As I'm sure is the case with most people, I was expecting to see a lot of footage of punk rock bands and terrorist groups. Instead what I found was a group of very peaceful elderly people intelligently discussing their anarchist beliefs.

The *Anarchism in America* documentary is the slower moving of the two, but still quite interesting. In it the filmmakers travel the United States interviewing and documenting those that call themselves anarchists. There are a couple of protestors involved (as you'd expect) as well as a brief appearance by Jello Biafra when he was fronting the Dead Kennedy's. For the most part however the filmmakers archive a variety of discussions on anarchist beliefs with average, everyday people such as truck drivers and farmers.

The key to this documentary is the profound idea of what anarchism *actually* is. Long associated with terrorism and punk rock, the roots of anarchism are anything but that. Pointing out the anarchist beliefs are simply that no one should rule over anyone else - that everyone is truly equal. This political belief is argued as a moral one as well, making the case that governments and religion are intended (and have always been intended) to keep the masses under control. There is definitely more than a little to think about offered here, whether you agree or not. I love things like that.

A large part of the people featured in *The Free Voice of Labor* documentary are immigrants and their children. Many of the true anarchists were Jews who came from communist Russia in search of a better life. At the turn of the century it was common to see anarchist events in large cities and they were very organized (they even had an anarchist Red Cross). During one discussion a man points out that communism was able to overtake Russia because they used anarchist slogans and pretended like it would be a country run by the people instead of run for the people. He goes on to say that the same thing happened in America as many anarchists became communists during the world wars for the same reason. The two have a lot in common, the difference being that the state owns everything in communist beliefs and in anarchists beliefs the people own everything, thus eliminating the need for paid government officials (they do acknowledge that their must be some form of government, just not a "class" of politicians).

The Jewish anarchists were connect through a newspaper entitled *The Free Voice of Labor* and the filmmakers give a brief overview/history of the paper and it's contributions to the anarchist movement. Fascinatingly though, they manage to spend the day with the editors on the last day that the paper remained open. Down to just 1,300 subscribers *The Free Voice of Labor* closes its doors during the making of this documentary.

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The Free Voice of Labor also takes you to a reunion of the students from a now defunct anarchist school. It's quite a stimulating event when you see how well they turned out given the fact that direction of their learning was entirely decided by the staff and students as equal voices. In my opinion this is a key predecessor to today's Montessori schools and possibly even home schools.

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This documentary was very informative and easy to watch. I definitely have anew respect for anarchism and a better understanding of it. Although, I am not an anarchist there are a number of things here that I agree with, further surprising me. These are two of the best documentaries I have probably ever seen and highly recommend them to any fans of the genre. 



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