

ORGANISATION  
AND ANARCHISTS

by

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This pamphlet is a compilation of notes sent for discussion to the National Election Conference in York on May 16-17th 1970. It is intended for discussion internal to the anarchist movement but its scope will be of interest to others who feel no attachment to any existing anarchist organisations.

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Anyone has only to look at the difference between the average anarchist group and the average branch of a trotskyist or other leninist league/party/organisation to see basic differences which are both the strength and the weakness of anarchism.

Most anarchists find it difficult to co-operate with other anarchists in serious work, industrial or whatever, but are very good at working within non-power oriented movements, unions, peace action, civil liberties, squatting...groups. While most leninist groups do nothing unless they can appear as a group, with a group line, with group identification and in more or less significant numbers.

This means that leninist groups are always noted on demonstrations, in unions or wherever, because they have turned up in numbers while anarchists are generally thought of as being more or less non-aligned and apolitical militants; so the leninists advertise themselves successfully and we do not. However, by the same token, on any long term basis, when there is a need for patient donkey work, the leninist group is quite incapable of this; either it must control the wider organisation or work to that end or it cannot consistently offer to help or fill any particularly necessary function (where there are leninist exceptions to this, they are untrue to their own theories).

This indeed, as everyone knows, was the basic point of revision among Russian marxists, with lenin insisting that everyone in his faction of the party being active in a cell controlled by that faction/organisation, and not recognising individual work within unions. It was for this reason that the bolsheviks were unable to work in the soviets in the 1905 revolution, and in the early days of 1917, and only did begin to work in the soviets when lenin, with the June/July theses and speeches, reversed his former position (indeed since he went back to it later one can say that lenin was for the latter half of 1917 an anti-leninist), and even then it was too late, so that the bolsheviks only achieved any degree of significance within the soviets as a result of the adherence of a number of smaller factions of which Trotsky's Mezhraindii and Gorky's International Social-Democrats, were only the largest.

For ideological, but even more for practical reasons, anarchist organisation must be almost the direct antithesis of the leninist forms. The fact that anarchists naturally work as loners in a number of organisations, means that despite smaller numbers we do a great deal more work within the wider direct actionist radical movement, than any trot faction is ever likely to do. The fact that they always operate as a group, that there is always that sense of not being alone in the struggle, means that the trots can attract people who would not be able to stand on their own feet, who like yelling in a crowd, but who do not like having to argue a case by themselves. The only place anarchists see such people is among the Eastern Anarchists. It is not entirely a loss, but nevertheless unless we can make it easier for people to come to us we will not grow.

It means that an anarchist group, as a rule only occasionally act as a group; it exists generally not for this, but for the exchange of experiences and ideas, for contact so that in emergency one is able to bring people in to help not normally working in the same field, and to be able to benefit from the contacts of others.



A number of us - often, though not altogether unfairly, described by our comrades as frustrated bureaucrats - try vainly to build groups and hold them together as unities. The mere fact that people are active in different fields, and liable to be drawn evermore into further actions in those fields, tends to make them have less and less time to spare to attend anarchist meetings - and so the group secretary/convenor tries vainly to exercise a centripetal force to counteract the tendency of any group to disintegrate. Disintegration is necessary to allow constructive activity, but unless an attempt is made to counter it the lone activist will tend to be drawn into reformist thinking as well as activity.

When the left is healthy and the anarchist groups largish, an industrial militant for instance is going to know that at the meetings he will meet, amongst others, people with similar industrial problems to himself, and people able to whip up solidarity action if he needs it. Apart from any other reasons for attending - and even if the subject for that particular meeting is one that bores him - this is a potent reason for attendance; and so since he meets other anarchists regularly, he will remain conscious that there are other anarchists about - a fact that seems less obvious when one is knocking one's head against a wall in industrial action.

When the left is weak, this no longer applies; the militant looks for his allies in action to other militants he can contact, who will not be anarchists, and one tends to accommodate to the opinions of one's friends and associates.

Obviously as we grow there will be more of us militant in a wider number of fields, and it will be less distance to the nearest anarchist group for most people - it is after all only ten years since there was only one anarchist group in England.

So we need to work out an organisational pattern and theory consistent with this nature of anarchists; both because we are not vanguardists ideologically and for the essentially practical considerations of anarchist psychology. In looking for this you cannot rely solely on past precedents of the anarchist movement.

(The three best known examples are the French and Spanish syndicalists and the American Wobblies, and one has only to look at them to see the differences. The CGT and the Bourses de Travails were created by non-anarchists (whether the ultra-reformist Municipal Socialists or the marxists) and responded under the particular pressures to which they were subjected by anarchist agitation, and though we can hope for similar circumstances we cannot rely on them. The CNT was able to build on the earlier anarchist-communist movement built in Spain by Guillaume, who in turn built on the foundations of the left-wing of Pi Y Margall's Proudhonist Federalist Party. The Wobblies built on the remains of the American railwaymen's union, the Knights of Labour, and at first were supported en bloc by the Western Federation of Miners and shadow organisations of allies it had built through the USA, and on the readership of 3 labour papers, and was supported initially by two established socialist political parties.)

It is easy enough to picture in the immediate pre-revolutionary period, a mass movement, basically syndicalist but bringing into syndicalism some other techniques of struggle. (The classical syndicalists in fact never did limit themselves purely to the industrial field - if they had done, the IWW could never have formed an unemployed industrial union branch, and the CNT could not have organised the running of whole communes in the revolution; but there is a curious myth that finds credence in English syndicalist circles - possibly scots and irish too - that they did.)



Such methods as the reverse strike of the unemployed and peasants used by Dolci in Sicily, could well be applied in certain circumstances in Britain.

But pictures of what we may have just before a revolution are hardly relevant as to what we need at this precise moment, or in the immediate future, except insofar as to give us a idea of something to strive to build - not an aim, but an interim aim - what we have to think about now, is the stage just a little ahead of what we can have now and can expect to form.

Thinking of this, it is well to note that for the period from now to the election, we are liable to have an influx of 'once every five years' elder anarchists, ready to do some work and share the anti-election campaigns, and that after the election whichever wins, there will be an onslaught on the trade unions; and if it is as I think probable Labour again (I expect an even larger majority unless Wilson deliberately bungles a little so as to cut down on his own back-benchers), the festering discontent with Labour that we began at last to see last year, will re-emerge fairly quickly, and more determinedly: so we can think in terms of an immediate growth, of say at least 20% with, after the election, a growth in trade union militancy (the trots will be trying to jump back on that bandwagon of course), which at least increase the efficacy of anarchist agitation (and improve morale) even if it is not reflected in ~~an~~ growth of numbers.

Not only do anarchist ways of working mean that though we do not grow so quickly, our work in wider movements is more effective than that of the Leninists; but they also mean that the impact of our work in such wider movement has an impact on the trots, and so forth - and will do at least until they start shooting us, which is not immediately on the cards (though I would not put a little informing and blacklegging in order to get the boss or police to chop us beyond the average member of the SLL, IS or IMG) - which prevents them killing all elements of rank and file democracy and dissent on the shop floor, or wherever.

So even though the trots, maoists and tutti quanti will grow faster than we, they cannot (if we maintain sufficient pressure) avoid attempting to create mass movements of direct action - as long as the radical revival continues. And it is such movements that we want; they provide the Milieux within which we wish to work; they might indeed with pressure follow the example of the CGT and Bourses in becoming libertarian and revolutionary as a result of the rank and file taking literally the arguments of their leaders. Provided that we can push the trots et al into creating such a mass movement, with a large conscious and active support, before the existing governmental system breaks down and the question of seizure of power is raised the workers' organisations that would arrive would be more powerful and firmly based than the Russian Soviets - and the vanguardists will never be able to impose their elitist solution.

So what we need to aim for in the not too distant future, what indeed in some measure we have already been doing, is a movement ideally designed to foster the emergence, wherever and whenever possible of direct actionist, non government oriented, and do-it-yourself political agitation groups, outside our own ranks, with were possible anarchist factions in them pushing for more direct action; countering the efforts of the politicians and creating links between direct action campaigns on different issues.

We could well take a leaf out of the Committee of 100's book - from the days when it was a fairly strong movement. The various sub-committees, whether industrial or to organise a particular demonstration, attracted people with similar concerns; were able to involve numbers of people in organising and planning work who would not have been drawn to work with an undivided committee as such; and fostered rank and file democracy and at the same time made a viable alternative both to formal democracy - the power of everyone knowledge-



able and unknowledgeable about an issue to have an equal voice in that issue, and democratic centralism - the restriction of the say in any re-arrangement of an organisation, to those who are most active in that organisation or section. (The alternative that the American peace movt. later christened participatory democracy; a term that had been sadly devalued since, as it appealed to politicians with no idea of what it originally meant, but a clear idea that they could use it for their own ends.)

Our aim should be to build a movement with a federal basis, with the basic units active in particular fields, industries, squatters and so forth, the groups not to be mutually exclusive, anyone prepared to work in more than one group should be more than welcome to do so, and it is only fair in a movement aiming to change society that someone active in several fields should have a say in each. Basic units should not be confined solely to anarchists - an industrial grouping for instance ought to consist not only of syndicalists but of Solidarity and anyone involved with Workers' Mutual Aid or any similar grouping - but they should be clearly aimed in an anarchistic direction, at least as far as the problems of their particular field. (An industrial militant who wants workers' control, and really means control, and not what the trots mean: by this phrase is working in an anarchist direction in industry, and the fact that he is not necessarily convinced of anarchism in all fields should not be debar him, providing he is not working for something plainly contrary to anarchism in his non-industrial life.)

Inevitably as such grouping grew they would attract vanguardists trying to capture them or divert activity into leninist channels; as I have said, one anarchist can in a large movement apply an awful lot of pressure to even a large trot group, so that such takeovers would not by themselves matter a great deal; they would mean that the anarchists, instead of being the core of a small direct action group, would become a ginger group within a larger one, and it would still be possible for us to make the running.

There are of course a few in the movement who, deriving their ideas from Nechaev (whose views they father on Bakunin) want a bastardised lenin-type organisation of more or less maoist stamp. But they are no more relevant to considerations of an anarchist movement than is the SLL

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Further points in a later letter:

1. Anarchism is do-it-yourself libertarian socialism.

2. Though there have been - at times - anarchists who saw the revolution coming as an instantaneous affair (whether cataclysmic as Bakunin or whether in the sense of the SPGB & SLP, who oppose all actions until all workers are ready for revolution) most anarchists have believed in a gradual revolution.

Generally anarchists believe that partial gains serve to raise the morale, commitment and revolutionary consciousness of the workers and prepare them for a second struggle and that the gains made are of use in further struggle. Though there have been those who argued as do the SLP & SPGB, that the system adjusts to every gain and reinforces itself and that thus reformism by blows (or by deeds generally) serves - like reformism generally - only to prop up the system.

3. Anarchists, opposing leadership and supporting partial direct action campaigns have therefore chosen to work through semi-anarchist movements such as syndicalism, civil disobedience campaigns, civil liberties groups and so forth; and have not been over-worried when 'impossibilist' marxists have labelled this 'dilution of aims' and 'reformism'.



4. But as among marxists, there is a distinction between those like Lenin and Trotsky (who advanced slogans appearing as "harmless" reforms, knowing that the nature of class society is such that these cannot be granted but that the ruling class does not like to admit that its democracy is limited at this point) and more orthodox reformists; so among 'reformists by direct action' there are differences when the issues, - unilateral abandonment of the State's major weapons of defence, the abolition of secret files throughout society, the abolition of homelessness completely, etc and more specific and limited reforms. So revolutionary anarchism seeks not just to 'widen the sphere of freedom' but to pose issues at which the ~~sphere~~ of freedom should be broadened which would mean that the struggle would transcend mere amelioration.
5. The aim of a revolutionary anarchist movement therefore is to push other direct actionist groups (some of which may be influenced by "Revisionist Anarchism" \*\*) so that they challenge the existing system. Not that the anarchist would favour an adventuristic action where people are pushed into taking on the State when they were not ready to do so, there can be no element of trickery, but that the need to challenge the State, sooner or later, if even partial gains are to be permanently kept, must be constantly stressed. Not too that the anarchists seek to deepen struggle just for its own sake, not to make easy converts to anarchism, they seek to explain that however limited that initial aims of the struggle they can only be finally fulfilled in an anarchist social revolution; and this is not to denigrate the value of partial struggles for they are important parts of a whole, the greater comprehends the part, and by that token the greater does not exist if the parts are not there. The parts of an anarchist revolution are innumerable small struggles by direct action means.
6. Where the revolutionary marxist cantalk of developing a reformist movement into a revolutionary one and so argue for work in the Labour Party, there is no single body which even by mistake might be taken to be the sum of direct actionist activity in any country. Many industrial actions are no doubt waged by bodies affiliated to the TUC, but no-one by the wildest stretch of imagination would ever suggest that the TUC represents the sum or even a major portion of the direct action movement in this country, though for many reasons it may well be advisable for anarchists to be members of their appropriate unions.
7. Therefore the first aim of an anarchist movement is not to infiltrate a larger direct actionist movement with revolutionary ideas, but is to create that larger movement in the first place.

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(\*\* "The magazine ANARCHY arose out of series of articles by Giovanni Baldelli, Nick Walter, Colin Ward, George Molnar and others entitled \*\*Revisionist Anarchism)