

THE FUTURE IN THE PRESENT: Libertarian Organisation & Structure,
No.1: Critical Anarchy.

This pamphlet takes a careful look at anarchism as it is talked about and in practice. By exploding some myths and exploring some new viewpoints that might be useful, it aims at an anarchism which bears a closer relation to how real people and groups operate. It seeks to begin a task of reconstructing libertarian ideas so that they can be used without dogma and are instead relevant to the needs and aspirations of working people, the poor, the unemployed and oppressed.

The FUTURE in the PRESENT

LIBERTARIAN ORGANISATION & STRUCTURE

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- Moulding the Break
- Marketplace Politics
- Practical Anarchy
- Non-Rational Politics
- Ritual Anarchy

60p

ISBN 1-870023-00-5
ISSN 0950-4141

No.1
Critical
Anarchy

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Libertarian Organisation & Structure.

NO 1. CRITICAL ANARCHY

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Published by LOS (Libertarian Organisation & Structure)
 1987 c/o Durham Community Co-op Bookshop,
 85a New Elvet,
 Durham DH1 3AQ

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

The Future in the Present.
 Nol: Critical anarchy
 1. Anarchism
 I. Libertarian Organisation Structure
 335'.83 HX833

ISBN 1-870023-00-5
 ISSN 0950-4141

Order from LOS: 60p per copy plus postage
 Normal trade terms.

Printed by Tyneside Free Press
 5 Charlotte Square
 Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4XF.

(The cover shows Barcelona dockers of the Co-ordinadora
 considering their next move at a mass meeting)

LOS COMMUNIQUÉ, December 1985

'A Note from "Libertarian Organisation & Structure"'

LOS was set up with the intention of understanding some of the things which prevent groups with basically anarchist intentions from achieving them. We are also open to the possibility that we might have to modify what we mean by "anarchist forms of organisation".

We are dissatisfied with the usual anarchist ideas of what to avoid in groups. For example we feel that the classical anarchist concept of authority as something a minority inflicts on an unwilling majority is only relevant in a limited number of situations. Our experience is that there are many more subtle ways in which authority can develop, such as people getting bored, personal links inhibiting challenge or criticism etc., and these can affect even the most committed anarchist.

Also we believe that classical anarchist theory is not based on the way people really do think, feel and behave. For one thing it has not taken on the vast changes in culture and economics which have occurred since its foundation. Also it reflects an over-simplified nineteenth century concept that a group is a collection of autonomous individuals who decide everything through rational processes that they completely understand. In fact a decision can be reached which seems rational on first impression, but actually results from hidden motivations, such as a desire to smoothe things over, the impressive way someone speaks for it, or even just people want to go home. Such considerations may seem trivial, but they can often be as significant as what people would insist their reasons were, and allowing for them can radically alter the way we decide to act.

Starting off from these criticisms we have been looking at groups, collectives and co-ops that we have been in. For example the County Durham network of miners' support groups has shown that large numbers of people can decide to adopt our ideas, such as delegates to be mandated, although they would never dream of calling themselves anarchists. Unfortunately these ideas often seem to get distorted or lost, even if no-one intentionally decides to set themselves up in authority. We feel it would be a good thing if the mechanisms behind this were better understood.

We'd like to work with a wider range of experiences than just ours, so if you have been in a group which came across these "structural" problems (bearing in mind that there is often more going on in a group hijacked by leninists than just their manipulations) we'd like you to send us details of what happened, why you think it turned out the way it did and how such failings might have been avoided. Any other comments would also be welcome, all letters will receive a reply and, in a few months time, when we bring out a pamphlet on the subject, you will get a free copy.

Thanks, LOS.

LOS COMMUNIQUÉ, June 1986

"Libertarian Organisation & Structure: What Next?"

1. Since the summer of 1985 LOS has been meeting regularly to discuss aspects of libertarian theory and practice. In particular we share the concern that anarchist ideas have remained fairly static, irrespective of repeated experience of failure and defeat. A rather "holier than thou" attitude has allowed anarchists to blame the State, authoritarians and other external conditions. The possibilities that the ideas as they stand may not have some kind of inevitable, trans-historical relevance, and that having those ideas does not in itself lead to good libertarian practice, continually escape attention.

We have therefore concentrated on the details of the failure of libertarian organisation, trying to pin down what it is about anarchist principles and anarchists in action that may be at fault. We have been very aware of the fact that few precedents exist for this kind of criticism and self-criticism among anarchists.

2. There are several contexts in which this examination of libertarian organisation is important. Most obvious are anarchist groups or movements, and organisations whose structures have been strongly influenced by libertarian individuals or principles. But equally important are situations where ordinary people come together in groups and spontaneously choose basic anarchistic structures. From the start we have tried to bring together analyses and critiques of these forms, stressing social and psychological factors rather than crude ideological rationalisations.

3. We began by focussing on specific personal experiences of libertarian groups or organisations breaking down or degenerating into authoritarian or hierarchical structures of one kind or another. These "case studies" included strike-support organisations, anarchist groups, housing co-ops and educational groups. From discussion of these, several prominent areas of concern arose. We then began to concentrate on these more general aspects of political groups.

4. Our first publication, a large pamphlet, is emerging from this work so far. In it we introduce our perspective, and discuss in some detail particular factors in political groups which we feel affect their activities profoundly. These include:

- The social ecologies in which groups operate,
- How admitting the impossibility of achieving absolute goals (such as an absence of authority) affects our understanding of anarchism,
- The effects of emotion,
- The development and influence of rituals.

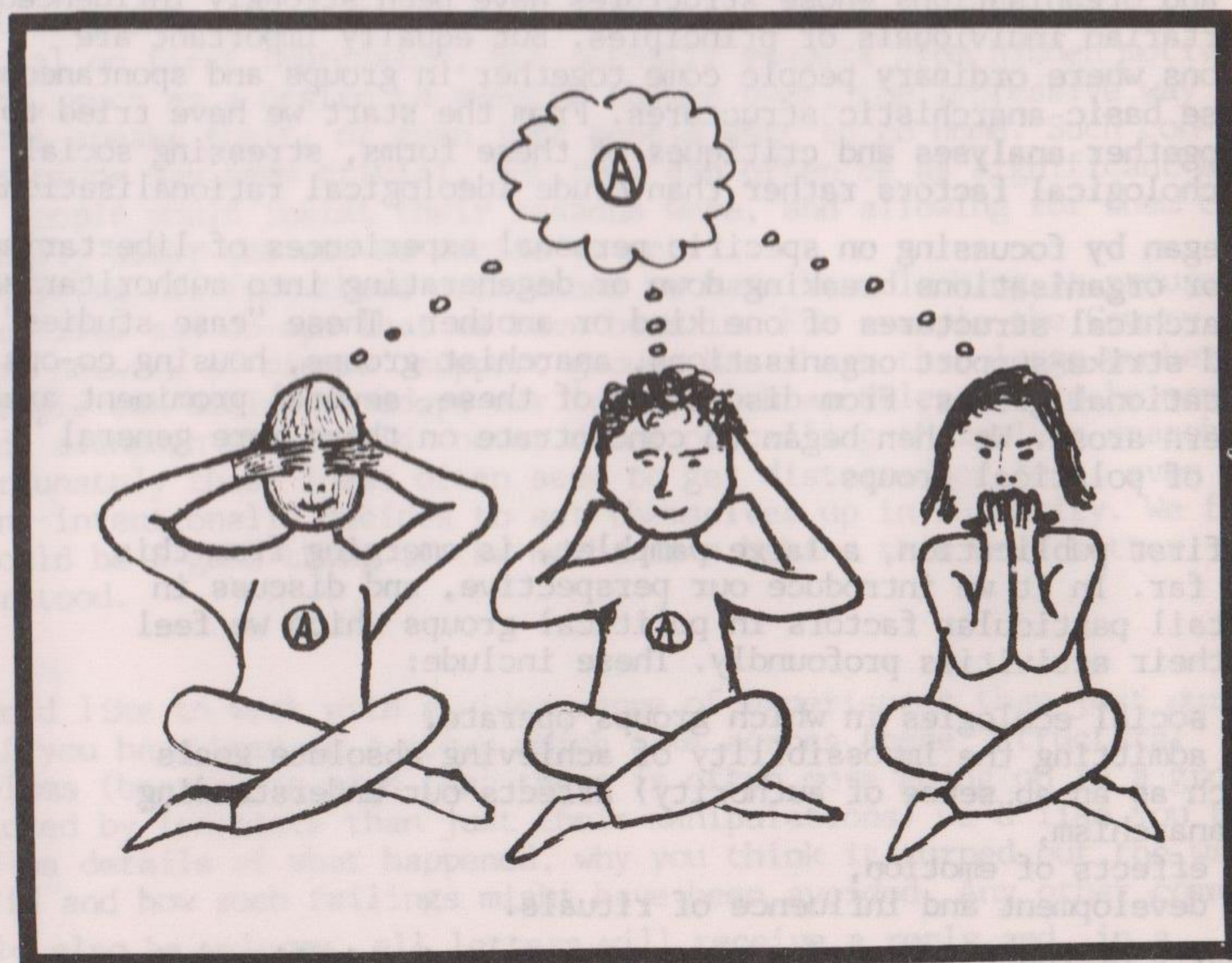
These parts of the pamphlet are being written individually, and as far as possible we have tried to keep them rooted in the reality of groups as we experience, perceive, think and feel about them.

5. Our immediate intention is to get the pamphlet published. Up to now we have remained a small group of 5 or so individuals. We plan to expand somewhat, and to extend our contact with other libertarians. If the pamphlet makes any impression we may try to continue in that vein and turn it into a semi-annual journal.

In addition LOS as presently constituted is thinking of producing more diverse publications, analysing particular historical and current situations as well as hoping to move in more pragmatically useful directions. All of this depends, of course, on decisions made by any new, larger LOS.

6. We are extremely interested in contact and correspondence with people who see some value in what we are trying to do. Please get in touch.

LOS.



Editorial

Each of the following chapters was written by a member of LOS. They were all changed to some extent after group discussions, but in each case what remains is the responsibility of the individual author. We think that the issues raised here are central to modern anarchism, but the way they have been dealt with here has not been collectively agreed. For example one member strongly disagrees with the interpretations of the recent history of the CNT given in "Non-Rational Politics". Or, the reduction of complex processes to "conditioning" in "Practical Anarchy" is strenuously opposed by another member. Or, the suggestions at the end of "Marketplace Politics" are looked on with suspicion by some. But for the implications of these issues to be examined, they first have to be raised, and in such a way as to demand attention. This we hope to do, in this and in future publications.

We want to encourage as much involvement as possible in our work by interested groups and individuals. Descriptions and analyses, however short and sketchy, of successes and failures in libertarian and working class groups are very valuable to us. They give direct, first-hand accounts which are much more meaningful than our second-hand analysis. We also welcome suggestions as to areas we could follow up. For example some of the directions we may be investigating next include: the effects of patriarchy; authoritarian left-wing groups; rank and file workers' organisations; assemblies and our participation in them; encouraging reflective honesty in groups.

We hope to receive comment and criticism from readers about the ideas presented here. We will print as many of these as possible in "The Future in the Present" no.2. Contributions will also be welcome in the form of short articles on any subject related to what we are doing. We would be happy to correspond with potential contributors on questions of subject-matter, length etc..

LOS, November 1986.

Moulding the Break: failure in libertarian organisation

Introduction

In this chapter several important historical episodes will be described very briefly. By highlighting particular aspects of these examples some of the ways that libertarian organisation can fail will be drawn out. This is not done in a spirit of pretending that it is possible to be totally libertarian, but to show that developments often dismissed as pedantic or ignored can have implications that are just as significant in the defeat of revolutions as the might of the State, Capital or other reactionary forces.

Other more general problems of libertarian practice are more visible when periods of revolutionary potential are examined. One striking feature of the examples described below concerns a certain tendency for fatalism or even apathy to develop among the masses at critical stages. There are many possible reasons for this, most of which come from the history of the people involved. Part of it comes directly from the material conditions which make struggle so necessary at a given time. Also these can encourage a "here and now" attitude to the possibilities of achieving more than the immediate satisfaction of some basic needs. Reformist or gradualist ideas can attract support when small gains are felt to need consolidating or guaranteeing, often just when the whole cake is within reach. As revolutionaries our ideology can help us believe that we can see a little further - that is, we can see the social revolution as more feasible and tangible than a vague utopian dream. But it is the mass of the people, as they are at the time, who have to make the revolution, and they will not have had the leisure to develop and refine ideas to comfort themselves with when it seems likely that all could be lost. But it isn't a case of the revolutionaries as more objective and rational than the ordinary people (a common marxist error) - if anything the reverse is true. A faith or trust in being able to go further helps tip the scales, but in the context of social upheaval this needs to come from the gut and heart at least as much as from the head. A saturation or intensification of revolutionary ideology will not do. In fact it can have the opposite effect - adding to whatever passivity, dependency or plain apathy is already developing in the masses. Political parties and vanguards rely on this process, where the masses are alienated by propaganda that bears little relation to what is making people feel as they do. Libertarians resort to pretending that individuals are rational, autonomous, conscious and consistent - a convenient and easy way out that also ignores the reality of how people are feeling. So many revolutionary ideas are riddled with these (and other) basically bourgeois assumptions. Part of our motivation for writing the later chapters of this pamphlet is to look for ways to subvert and avoid some of these pitfalls, while still holding out the promise of a good libertarian theory and practice. In the examples discussed in this chapter what are focussed on are not necessarily the central issues involved, and are not necessarily all that important in the last analysis. But I think they show how rudimentary our ideas and analysis always seem to have been, because it would have been relatively easy to tease out dozens more interesting aspects of each case, hardly any of which have been discussed (or even noticed?) in the anarchist literature. We can't afford to be so sure of ourselves. To do so would mean to rely on the same failure of bullshit detectors in the working class as the authoritarians thrive on.

Russia 1917

From February 1917 the most combative workers of Petrograd inspired a rash of strikes and demonstrations. From women textile workers, power- and metal-workers, action spread over the city, beginning from demands around pay and conditions but escalating into a determination to achieve self-management by their own efforts. This awareness was helped by the inability of political parties and Soviets to recognise the problems faced by workers, let alone suggest meaningful solutions. By the end of March factory committees had been set up throughout Petrograd and Moscow and these began to organise together at district and then regional levels.

The bolsheviks only started talking about workers' control and "All power to the soviets" after the February events began to unfold. But in the subsequent months they were the single political grouping whose public pronouncements implied that they wanted to go as far as workers wanted. They gained a decisive influence in some factory committees because of this. But bolshevik members of committees themselves assumed that what their party leaders were talking about was real workers' control, so that this influence did not yet hamstring the committees. The widespread and growing practice of co-opting party militants subverted the libertarian nature of most soviets much more rapidly, and in many cases the assembly of the soviet never had real power from the start (self-appointed executive bodies did instead).

While workers and soldiers were already coming to the conclusion that only they could take appropriate action, peasants had already put this into practice - seizing the land and forming peasant committees, which were quick to co-ordinate their activities. The regional organisations were not strictly non-hierarchical but the peasants side-stepped this by ignoring at local level decisions they disagreed with. The much-vaunted myth of the "backwardness" of proletariat and peasantry is exactly wrong - the middle class party political activists dragged behind, impeded and eventually crushed the workers and peasants in their moves to construct a truly revolutionary society.

Because workers had assumed that the bolsheviks meant more or less the same thing as them with respect to workers' control, they went ahead with formulating their plans for industry and the economy. These crystallised in several proposals which soon excluded trade unions and employers from participation, stressing the fundamental role of decisions made at grass-roots and the flow of power upwards. Although bolshevik leaders were already saying that workers' control actually meant state control, workers were still operating under the assumption that they now controlled the relations and forces of production.

As the huge gap between bolshevik leaders and workers started to become clear the Central Council of Factory Committees drew up a plan for workers' control that most factory committees preferred to the bolsheviks' "Counter-Manual" (which amounted to a complete lack of workers' control). Soon the Supreme Economic Council announced that it would refuse funds to factories taken over by workers as an alternative to closure. Even now, leading members of factory committees who were also bolsheviks were still calling for control of industry from the base.

In 1918 bolshevik leaders and trade union officials began in earnest to sabotage self-management in a rigorous, organised way. "Nationalisation", Taylorism and one-man management were inflicted on workers. Factory committees were recognised to be the main obstacle left to bolshevik control, and were no longer even part of any consultative procedure. The move to state capitalism had been engineered, and workers' control a complete illusion.

It is certain that the factory committees did not recognise early enough the nature of what the bolshevik party would represent in power. An important consideration here was the leading role of bolshevik workers and the disproportionately high numbers of bolsheviks on very many factory committees. Many of these people

genuinely in favour of self-management, and they and other workers believed that since the party had proclaimed itself in favour of workers' control, then all that was necessary was to let the party know what workers wanted and it would be done. For months after party leaders had been issuing decrees and statements about the running of industry and the economy that were overtly reactionary and anti-worker, workers could still identify the bolsheviks with their bolshevik colleagues at work, and not perceive the threat clearly enough to orientate themselves appropriately.

Partly, of course, workers had access to no experiences, themselves or from history, of a potential political leadership saying anything remotely similar to workers' own aspirations. And anyway, how would the workers find out what the bolsheviks really wanted and would actually do? They already knew what they wanted and had developed advanced plans for achieving it, plans which furthermore took the organising of the whole of society into account. They couldn't be expected to waste time monitoring what the bolshevik party or other irrelevancies were doing or saying, since they had little reason to believe how inimical to their interests the party was. Bolshevnik workers were not much slower than others to realise what was going on once the factory committees had been reduced to mere appendages of the trade unions, but for workers the realisation was far too late.

The question of attitudes to leadership is raised here, and it has been relevant and neglected ever since. Workers could listen to potential political leaderships, and if what they heard sounded compatible with what they wanted - they might assume that that leadership was OK. This is especially likely if individuals known to them personally were associated with that leadership. Socialist and authoritarian revolutionaries have been able to assert power via this route many times, after manoeuvring themselves far enough before workers have seen through them. Militant grass-roots members are obviously an absolute pre-requisite for the process to work, and whatever their party allegiance these militants are often among the most respected in their workplaces despite that allegiance. The combination of loyalty to the leadership and respect from workmates means that the rank and file party member can seem like a beacon of secure certainty in the confusions and contradictions of communities embroiled in revolution. While striving to grasp political power, the party leadership has to focus on keeping the loyalty of the grass-roots and doing as little as possible in the open that will undermine the respect shown to grass-roots members by other workers.

This might hint at why it is so difficult in revolutionary situations for workers to overcome their blindness to leadership. We cannot make a clear distinction between leadership from external sources (the state, other intermediate sources) and that from within radically democratic structures with assembly control and recallable delegates (leading militants, traditional personal alliances etc.). Of course there are differences in principle and potential, but people making decisions for themselves collectively involves far more than weighing up principles and present reality in some ideal, rational manner. The process of collective action itself inevitably involves certain individuals taking a leading role in some spheres, and some people are competent in many spheres. In crisis there is a simple need for effectiveness, which is precisely where leaders will tend to become differentiated from their fellows. If to some extent this will always happen; how, when and where would a more fundamentally libertarian practice be re-asserted in the committees and councils?

Spain 1936

The events in Spain during 1936 and 1937 raise questions of tremendous importance to ideas of libertarian organisation and federation during revolutionary periods - questions that have yet to be addressed seriously by anarchists. Workers' and peasants' control of communities and production was virtually complete Catalonia and in much of Aragon, Murcia and the Levant after July 1936. But in Catalonia, where much of Spanish heavy industry was based, the CNT-FAI failed to push through the social revolution. This left the bourgeoisie and the political parties with

several toeholds from which to extend their power, which they had all but lost. They were progressively able to recuperate social and economic functions from workers and to impose the republican counter-revolution. The initial compromise came with the formation of the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias (CCAFM) in Catalonia, which gave republicans and communists and the socialist party and trade union (with its leadership unaccountable to the grass-roots) an influence out of all proportion to their levels of support in that region. Their partial control over the military campaign against the fascists enabled the politicians and reformists to grow strong enough to re-constitute state government, as well as severely impeding the war effort. This decisive retreat from its revolutionary programme was agreed at a CNT regional delegate meeting, and was the first clear instance of grass-roots control being surrendered to an unrepresentative body (the CCAFM). After this precedent for collaboration had been set, CNT leaders even entered the republican government and were given ministries - in effect they were now in a position to make decisions that were entirely unconnected to their supposed roles as an executive of mandated delegates with carefully circumscribed powers. We may criticise those individuals on all sorts of grounds, since their behaviour represented the failure at critical moments of anarcho-syndicalist organisation and the revolution. But a much more necessary task is to determine how the whole structure of the CNT had in the end to depend on the goodwill and good sense of its elected and revocable officials, who became able when they saw fit to ignore the rule of the assembly or congress and act without consulting anyone. If higher-level officials of anarchist organisations will inevitably be left in this position by the nature of the organisational structure (and where what they then do has such profound effects) then we seem to be relying on the best "leadership", just as leninist parties and others do. This would presumably be a bitter pill for libertarians to have to swallow. There seems to have been no thought devoted to the possibility that control from the base can be consciously given away in conditions of confusion, uncertainty and crisis.

The situation is made more complex when the patterns of grass-roots involvement in CNT decisions is looked at. CNT workers busy running their industries in Barcelona or fighting in the militias could not realistically be expected to participate in the same way as before, especially if they were expecting that the CNT's programme would be carried out. But there was no adaptation made to this situation, so that the flow of decisions followed exactly the same course as when the CNT was "just" a union. It may be that the CNT's structure and/or programme, and/or anarcho-syndicalism itself were at fault, in that it was possible (in fact rather easy) for collaboration with counter-revolutionaries to occur at all.

Strangely, what analysis of this problem there has been among anarchists has generally followed the trend of focussing on elites and leaderships, rather than looking for structural mechanisms to minimise their impact. The Friends of Durutti, for example, presented an excellent analysis of the preceding events in "Towards a Fresh Revolution", written in Barcelona in 1938. But their solution to the problem of leadership was to elect another, one that would be parallel to the "economic" leadership of the union. This would administer military struggles, international affairs and revolutionary order and propaganda. The "Revolutionary Junta" or "National Defence Council" would have the advantage of clarifying the boundaries of control of the existing committees (which were, after all, only experienced in conducting economic struggles) so that these would deal with production and distribution and leave fewer ambiguities regarding their role in other areas. But the Junta, although formed according to scrupulous attention to direct democracy (ie elected in the same way as the union leadership) would then suffer from the same deficiencies as the CNT-FAI leadership did - there would be no way of ensuring that they stuck to carrying out the wishes of the assemblies. In any rapidly changing situation or crisis the committee would have to act without consultation or control from the base. Since hard, unexpected decisions are characteristic of such periods there would now be two national committees coming out with inevitably suspect (given human fallibility) decisions. Because the need for decisions cannot

always be put off until a subsequent congress, there seems no way to guarantee that the same mistakes will not be made. Furthermore, if assemblies that were held in this period happened to vote away some of its control over the committee how could such decisions be undermined? The Friends of Durutti's system would duplicate the disadvantages along with the advantages it might bring. Clearly we need to explore every other conceivable solution before being content with an idea that suffers from the same flaws as what it is intended to rectify.

Hungary 1956

The workers' councils which ran industry and communities in Hungary at the end of 1956 were defeated primarily by the Russian Army helped by the stalinist Hungarian security police (AVH). The military defeats in the first week of November were followed by a 6-week period of undermining and destroying the workers' councils, by fake negotiations and by relentless indiscriminate terror. Finally Russian soldiers broke the generalised strikes and sit-ins by installing themselves in factories with their guns trained on workers. But by then the workers' attitudes were largely sullen, hating and resigned, a development which may nothave been necessary or inevitable.

If we look at some of the actions taken by the workers' councils, particularly their tactics after the military defeat, we can see some possibly ill-advised moves which helped the stalinists to break the revolution in the way that they did. These moves may perhaps tell us something about the shortcomings of spontaneous workers' uprisings when there has been no tradition or recent pattern of rank and file militancy, and when no libertarian working class organisation has given experience of direct democracy in dealing with their oppressors.

During the fighting, the factories were working at fever pitch producing arms and ammunition. Afterwards the councils correctly saw that they still held the trump card of control over production. But a return to work was proposed (to the fury of many), supposedly to show that the workers on strike were conscious and organised.

If the immediate necessities of life were produced and distributed by their workers and their councils, this would show, if it needed showing to anyone in Hungary at that time (Russian soldiers and commanders not excepted) that workers were indeed very conscious and organised. In any event, miners and powerworkers in the provinces did not return to work, although industrial workers in the cities largely did. This divided the movement, and although other general strikes occurred during the next weeks, there was now a fragmentation of action compared to the previous solid stance of the councils that the Russians had to deal with. Once this fragmentation was started it became easier for the Russians and the AVH to pick off groups of workers in specific localities more or less at their leisure (mass shootings of miners, mass forced deportations etc.). This might not have been so easy if the councils were still united, if the determined face of resistance had not turned into some workers staying adamant, some going back to work, others not knowing what the hell was going on. And the return to work was all for the sake of showing the Russians what they already knew - that the workers were conscious, organised and disciplined. Instead, partly as a result of the partial return to work they became passive and gradually lost any co-ordinated initiative.

It is not very easy to determine the origin of the return to work policy. It would be rather odd for it to have been purely and simply the general feeling of the mass, transmitted faithfully into the deliberations of the workers' councils. Odd, in the light of the heroic action and resistance in October and considering the explosive activity afterwards (eg a general strike following a rumour that the CWC - Central Workers' Council - had been arrested) and the general spirit of workers even given their desperate situation (as in the jokes and graffiti to be found everywhere on the streets). Is it perhaps more likely that the feelings that

crystallised as the return to work in support of the CWC were only expressed in that way because of the complete inexperience at mandating delegates and circumscribing the role of the assembly and the executive? For example, delegates could be in the position of having to convey a sense of weariness and disgruntlement. Such feelings would be totally understandable, to say the least. They do not necessarily represent complete exhaustion and resignation. But it makes more sense of the CWC's return to work decision if the perception of the council was more the latter than the former, when that perception was wrong. In such a subtle and unintentional way workers could have been more convinced of their weakness by the council's decision than by any attitudes in themselves. There is some evidence that gaps of days occurred before workers' assemblies acted on their realisation that their councils were not representing them appropriately. New councils tended to have a much more robust and militant stance. Again this could show a lack of experience of rank and file control - as well as demonstrating the flaws in a theory of instant recall next to the actuality of damage being doing when the "instant" takes days.

What differences such supposed nuances of organisation might have had is debatable. We might suspect that Russia would have prevailed whatever it had to do to achieve this. Nevertheless the mere possibility that the whole course of a revolution can be changed by the realities of delegation subtly influencing the decisions made implies that we should be open to these effects as a matter of course. The fact that none of the literature covers these areas shows how neglected this perspective has been.

Paris 1968

Following the spark of the student movement and its repression then advance, profoundly revolutionary moves were made by workers aiming and organising for self-management. Eventually the reformists of the unions and PCF (French Communist Party) re-established their control, drawing deeply on the reserves of their reputation as the organisations acting in the interests of workers. What could have culminated in a revolutionary challenge to French social democracy was eventually little more than a means of refinement of state and economic structures in factories and universities.

But only just. For example in Nantes, a city with a sizeable Gaullist majority in elections, a "commune" of sorts functioned for nearly a fortnight, inspired mainly by an idiosyncratically radical set of local trade unions.

The PCF and union hierarchies saw nothing for them to gain by the spread of this model, and were content to subvert and mystify in the hope of holding onto at least some of their traditional levers of power. From their strategic positions they helped twist the potential of self-management into isolated pockets of partly self-managed (or "co-managed") refined self-exploitation. The PCF and unions minimised the damage to their hierarchies, in a context where the state would have been far less able to assert control in June without their assistance. Although the potential for revolution was defused, the tumultuous May of 1968 in Paris did show that revolution was possible in a modern industrial capitalist state, something that had been in some doubt throughout the left.

The students' achievements were more significant as an example of determined action yielding a retreat by the state, rather than what they amounted to in themselves. Self-management of the university was largely a failure, both of internal organisation and of opening up education for ordinary people. But it represented a graphic illustration of the fact that it was possible for the conditions for self-management to be created. It is safe to assume that if the scale of the revolt had grown and intensified, workers would have been well able to begin the tasks of social production much more successfully than the students could organise social education.

What stopped this happening?

Firstly, the combined efforts of PCF and the unions were concentrated on de-radicalising workers. Ideas of workers control and revolution were treated with contempt and extravagant hostility, and any moves that were made (occupations, general strikes etc) were interpreted as limited actions only, for specific short term aims. This tactic was made easier by the "personalities" of the leading student militants and by the extent to which most student revolutionaries were separate from and ignorant of the working class. The student action committees at Censier produced enormous amounts of excellent propaganda distributed among workers, describing the possibilities of direct action and workers' control and using the language and concepts of the working class. But apart from this shining example, the antics of other students must have come as a great relief to the union and party bureaucrats striving to portray the ideas of revolution and workers' control as at best utopian and out of touch and at worst as lunatic or designed to provoke the state into repression.

The attitudes of the students towards the unions were also implicated. Whatever libertarian currents supposedly existed among students, the predominant feeling was one of leadership - not necessarily in any directly authoritarian sense, but implied in a smug or arrogant posture of "showing the workers the way". This led them to consistently misjudge the mood of workers they came into contact with, so that workers who otherwise could have gone all the way were led to see some truth in what the bureaucrats were saying. There were also very contradictory attitudes towards union bureaucrats. To oversimplify, two extremes of reactions were displayed. Leninist, trotskyist and other bureaucratic types amongst the students, for example, started from vanguardist and elitist conceptions that caused them to emphasise leaderships and to focus on these in other groups in a very simple-minded way. Hence their stress tended to be directed up the union hierarchy, away from the rank and file workers. The maoist-anarchist-Guevarist types, on the other hand, dismissed the whole union structure as reactionary, and almost coincidentally dismissed the workers themselves along with this, in practice. There was certainly a very substantial core of truth in the judgments against the unions, but the best way to use these criticisms constructively would have been to consider the workers' attitudes, rather than to "know best" and preclude any discussion. The workers did largely distrust their unions, on one level, but also knew that in terms of limited, material improvements that the union had actually given some slight protection over the years. But there was very little in the way of tangible evidence that students were with them, other than the words. What was needed was for workers to realise that the prevailing situation completely altered the terms of debate, such that the unions were now irrelevant except as a brake. Many workers, especially younger ones, rapidly came to just that conclusion. But the stage was never reached where the unions were ignored and by-passed in addition to being perceived as irrelevant, or at least not on anything like the scale required. By the skin of their teeth, in many cases, they managed to cling onto the reputation of being on the workers' side (whatever their faults). To have contributed to the revolutionary possibilities the students would have had to demonstrate that they would support the workers, not lead them in any sense. Many felt that they were on the workers' side, but too often this was in complete ignorance of the working class and its history, present conditions and capabilities - it was more of an unreal or idealised working class that the students often had in mind - and workers could see that this was the case. The communist and union leaders were thus able to persuade workers (or at least maintain a sufficient level of doubt in their minds) that the students and the ideas associated with them were adventurist, alien and so on.

If there had been more of the untiring production of sound propaganda from any number of Censiers, and less of the narcissistic histrionics, head-in-the-clouds childish idealism and less self-obsessed marxist pedantry in general, things may have been different. Consistent support and encouragement, in words and in action, could have resulted in a more fertile blending of the practices of revolutionary students and workers.

The self-satisfaction of the revolutionary students undoubtedly played a large part in alienating workers from them, just enough to obstruct constructive dialogue. Naturally the ideologies and experiences of the two groups differed, but the sentiments of workers were overwhelmingly in support of the students in their campaign against the government and educational authorities, especially in the light of their brutal use of riot police. Doubt and suspicion were sown as events escalated - not just by others, but by the students themselves as well.

We can draw an analogy between the Paris students and revolutionary groups in general. Although in Britain these are not necessarily composed of people from mainly middle class backgrounds (most are), the arrogance characteristic of revolutionaries will inevitably impede the dissemination of the ideas to workers, who are not so attached to ideological purity or certainty - they tend to live in a more realistic world. This presents a real paradox, because we refine our politics as best we can, and the more satisfied with it we become the more this will appear as smugness to those not immediately and totally convinced. The problem goes much deeper than this, because we compensate for our uncertainty by exaggerating our feelings of certainty. This is why most anarchist propaganda is seen as so simple-minded by ordinary people. Usually it gives no clues as to what could be done about anything immediately and concretely, instead talking in vague generalisations which sound very nice. But the working class have always been inundated with very nice-sounding ideas. Our propaganda and interventions will only convince people that our nice ideas are different if we find some way of avoiding self-satisfaction in our groups, and in my experience this will be a quite gargantuan task, if the energy and commitment necessary to make up for small numbers is to be kept too.

Czechoslovakia 1968

During the "Prague Spring" up to August 1968, workers were deeply suspicious of the workers councils set up by the "liberal-technocratic" regime under Dubcek. These were correctly seen as agents of more efficient exploitation, which was clear, for example, from their composition - only 20% were workers. The suspicion was so deep and complete that most workers either had no idea what the councils were or thought that they were a government plot to make workers responsible for production failings. However, the liberalisation of the period coincided with workers thinking and making demands centred around making the trade union movement more accountable and representative of the grass-roots. "Purges from below" were widespread throughout industry, where Party apologists, bureaucrats and other superfluous officials cluttering up the factory committees were displaced wholesale by militant workers. While this was going on workers realised that horizontal links with others were crucial if the gains they could make were to be pushed forward or built upon. From totally autonomous action involving a large proportion of Czech workers, committees for the defence of Press freedom were formed entirely outside of pre-existing institutions or machineries.

It would be idle speculation to wonder where these developments could have led because the picture changed completely after the Russian invasion in August. Resistance took several main forms. Workers' control of the media was short-lived, but important since it facilitated much of the resistance that followed. A very interesting change of attitude occurred towards the workers' councils, which were part of the reform party's 'achievements' that related most to workers. They were thus seen as symbolic of the pre-invasion advances made by workers. Also workers began to see what they could be turned into - away from what the Party wanted into what they wanted. With the advent of worker-student solidarity treaties the councils began to be taken over by workers. They elected councils in defiance of the government and organised these horizontally together into an association of workers' councils.

Both proletarianisations, of the trade unions before the invasion and of the workers councils afterwards, were situations where workers began to subvert state

institutions for their own ends. However much "democracy" had been introduced into the lower levels, the Party still retained much leverage, especially at higher levels where it could manoeuvre unseen and create confusion and uncertainty. This made the Dubcek regime's normalisation under instruction from Moscow far easier than it might otherwise have been. The other, more subtle factor here was the ambivalent attitude of the workers towards the government (and particularly Dubcek himself), into 1969. Both before and after the invasion the government did not reflect working class interests - before it followed the interests of the scientific intelligentsia, and afterwards these were overlaid by those of Moscow. But workers could still identify Dubcek with the positive steps they were trying to achieve for themselves (which in fact were incompatible with the reformers' programme). This confusion repeatedly led workers to pause when Dubcek appealed for them to become passive again (and again...). Their autonomous activity was by no means half-hearted, but gains could not be consolidated or built on in the face of the tendency to project their own achievements into an alien leadership. It is as if workers could not fully believe that they were responsible for what had been gained, and for what they could have gone on to.

In Western societies too politicians mystify by becoming associated with emotional forces among ordinary people, while in practice their behaviour accords with their own interests.. On a rational level workers can, and often do, see straight through the intrigues and machinations of government. The threat from this has steadily grown, and the state and capitalists have had to develop more subtle means of bypassing it. Appealing to psychological levels deeper than simple rationality is a major part of their adaptation. Libertarian ideas and practices have not responded to this change.

Portugal 1974

The failure of the Portuguese revolution of 1974 illustrated a rather new phenomenon which we might call a "proliferation of leaderships". Huge strides were made by workers, unemployed and peasants, but their advances were progressively spoiled and killed off by the clamour of competing, backstabbing and manipulating Leninist factions as well as by the typically deadening and stultifying Communist and Socialist Parties. Most of these alternative "leaderships" had wriggled into influence in national and local state machinery, and eventually returned to those positions as the only way they could survive - sacrificing the people as they went. They also had varying degrees of influence in the Armed Forces, whose militant action (mainly instigated by leftist officers) precipitated the potentially revolutionary situation after April 25th 1974.

The leftist sects did their best to gain control of the autonomous grass-roots organisations that sprang up to represent the masses (workers' committees, neighbourhood committees, agricultural co-operatives, shanty-town and squatters' organisations etc.). Leftists usually had to conceal their Party affiliations to avoid being thrown straight off of committees. For example Inter-Empresas (federation of workers' committees) and Inter Comissoes (federation of shanty-town neighbourhood committees) managed for a time to resist the pressure of Party wrangling and manipulation. But virtually all of the autonomous organisations ended up as pawns in someone else's larger-scale plan. Before this happened the most radical actions occurred. Eventually though, most committees were reduced to nothing once the disaffected ordinary people had ceased to care about them. By November the sects had gone back to their previous electoral manoeuvring, having ruined the autonomous activity that might have guaranteed revolution. The result of the election was a very conservative "socialist" government, which can be interpreted as the masses being sick and tired of the total confusion and stagnancy caused by their experiences of more directly democratic groups (in principle) in which they still achieved no real control over the decisions affecting their lives.

Encompassing the detailed development of the grass-roots organisations was the problem of the military, who remained completely separate from and unaccountable to

the people. Arming the workers and peasants was never on the agenda, and a highly significant area of control was denied to them. The situation in the military was from the start parallel to what happened in the civilian organisations. Supposed "soldiers councils" and "rank and file units" were shown to be devoid of substance when deprived of the direction of their leftist officers. So although it was only the support of the military which stopped the Socialists and Communists crushing workers and peasants occupations of factories and the squatting of empty houses during 1974, this was very much in a context of condescension - the masses knew that the military could impose what it liked, when it liked. This impotence compounded the frustrations and ineffectiveness of committees infected by leftists. It produced and cultivated apathy on the part of genuinely radical workers and the poor. They were interested in their conditions of existence and wanted to ensure that a system would be built that could meet their needs. This was not possible when groups were overrun by leftist sectional interests.

The rivalries of the "workers' parties" spoiled the movement in several ways. Federation became increasingly difficult as it was not possible to know in whose interests a neighbouring committee was now acting. Within groups the leftists gravitated onto committees via their grasp of procedure and experience in organisations. Once there, even if they started out with the best of intentions (ie as bona fide workers, residents etc) their use of jargon and mystification bored and confused ordinary assembly members, and on its own this hampered proceedings. This process was accelerated when members of other factions were also on the committee. Debate from the platform was already couched in terms unfamiliar to the floor, and agendas and motions would be treated according to motivations unintelligible to the non-initiated. In addition, what were soon at stake were Party interests, camouflaged with rhetoric about the interests of those they were supposed to be representing.

Perhaps this is the most important implication of the issues discussed later in "Practical Anarchy". Even if we optimistically assume that ordinary people will be willing to spend long periods debating the minutiae of their community's life and economy, surely they would not when the discussions were continually being obscured by private interests - using the language, moreover, in which these private interests were described as the interests of all. Given that many people's experiences of committees and assemblies will involve various species of manipulator, what mechanisms can prevent the latter from subverting assembly control and mandated delegation, and driving away the very people that need consistently to be there? After Portugal the prospect of assemblies where only bickering leftists remain to make decisions is a truly horrifying one.

Poland 1980

The events in Poland in 1980 and 1981 are to some extent the logical consequences of the repression in Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968, as well as of the resistance of Polish workers in 1956 and 1970. The free trade union Solidarnosc was a workers' mass social movement which inevitably posed political demands implying a far-reaching confrontation with the State. But the fulfilment of these demands in practice would have meant the complete elimination of the Communist Party from society into its last bastion in the State apparatus. It probably would not have survived even there, but anyway Russia would not have permitted such a course of events to develop, as it had not elsewhere. A fundamental realisation throughout Solidarnosc was that they could gain nothing from a Russian invasion. Because of this they continually sought to conduct themselves so as not to threaten the limits of Party control. It was not that Solidarnosc militants wanted the Party (or the State), it was a realistic appreciation that they had to demand what the State could offer, as both employer and government. Thus their repeated last-minute compromises to bail out the Party co-existed with visions of a free communist society moving from militant rank and file unions to revolutionary workers' councils. These visions were

felt to be in line with long-term historical developments. But the present was seen through a filter of Party hegemony and the fragile Polish nationhood (represented, at least in emotional terms, by the Church). A moral sense of democracy & freedom interacted with both political and social aspirations, and guided the structuring and development of the working class movement all along. If the period was revolutionary, this was more because the Party was close to breaking point under the combined effects of economic stresses and its alienation from society as a whole as well as the demands coming from Solidarnosc. Although very many Party members were militants in Solidarnosc, they completely identified with the union in its heyday, reducing their Party membership to the status of a hollow, formal gesture to the political reality of Poland.

The political nature of Solidarnosc as a trade union became clearer as the economic crisis deepened in 1981, with the debates over self-management and workers control. Any meaningful version of either would alter Solidarnosc's role from trade union to an alternative to Party control of the economy. But as the Party prepared for repression the idea of self-management too became a compromise - where workers elected factory managers, but no more.

Right from the start, the same contradictions that gave Solidarnosc its particularly powerful character as a social movement also led to its inability to frame demands which would lead beyond allowing the Party a predominance that it could not retain on its own. A trade union aiming at a transformation of society cannot simultaneously resolve the paradox involved by seeking affirmation in nationhood, or even in a sense of community - this is a way of going nowhere. After many pauses and compromises Solidarnosc finally agreed on making a start at formal political action at its Congress in September 1981; although again the way this was framed was conducive to compromise. This action was intended to fan outwards to trade unionists in other Warsaw Pact countries, and inwards in calling for an even more radical autonomy of the base of Solidarnosc from its leadership. The roles of the Party in the State, and the Soviet Union in the Warsaw Pact were ignored, but the proclamations brought together themes of self-management and control of the economy, and stresses Polish independence at the same time as predicting a federalisation of free trade unions throughout eastern Europe. Once again a compromise, in that a feeling for insurrection was combined with a gradualist pragmatism. Once again the Party could bank on this as its last card. The effects of previous step-downs was to prompt still more. For example, the hedging over self-management and the refusal to allow revolutionary trade unionist ideas their fullest expression meant that the only possible alternative to the repression and militarisation of society and industry had already been precluded, and worn away in compromise. In essence, the strong initial desire to maintain the unity and cohesion of Solidarnosc stopped the tangle of contradictions over union/social/political spheres being addressed; no integration was possible, bar a defensive nationalism and a paralysis over action.

Solidarnosc as a movement accurately reflected the motivations of its members - it was democratic in more than the conventional sense. For a mass movement to be a social and political vehicle for the working class - which we see as necessary - some form of "revolutionary realism" is needed. But Poland at the beginning of this decade shows how difficult such a task will be; even if, and perhaps especially if, the rank and file of workers are as sophisticated and radical as the Polish working class clearly has been. Such a thorough understanding of the complex levels of political and social change, and of the constraints on that change, tied in with a reluctance to risk too much. Since we would never be in a position to be able to guarantee revolution (short of wishful thinking) we need to develop strategies of propaganda and intervention that would be effective in helping to transcend such a reluctance.

Conclusions

A revolutionary libertarian organisation needs to express and sustain revolutionary developments and eruptions. But it must be flexible enough not to straightjacket the

mass. They must make the choices of demands and determine how they are to be articulated. The organisation must not restrict itself to areas within its ambit before the revolutionary period, and should not lead to a situation where urgent and pressing decisions have to be forced through a pre-existing executive structure which cannot properly handle them, and shouldn't need to.

During revolutionary periods the organisation should be, and should be seen to be, nothing more than the expression of class co-ordination, mutual aid and solidarity. It should not be seen as some additional layer; at least partly outside of the class. This applies both to the constructive tasks of workers' councils and community federations, as well as the destructive tasks of defending the revolution against the bourgeois state machinery and fifth column distortion and recuperation, as well as those wishing to subvert the revolution to their own ends.

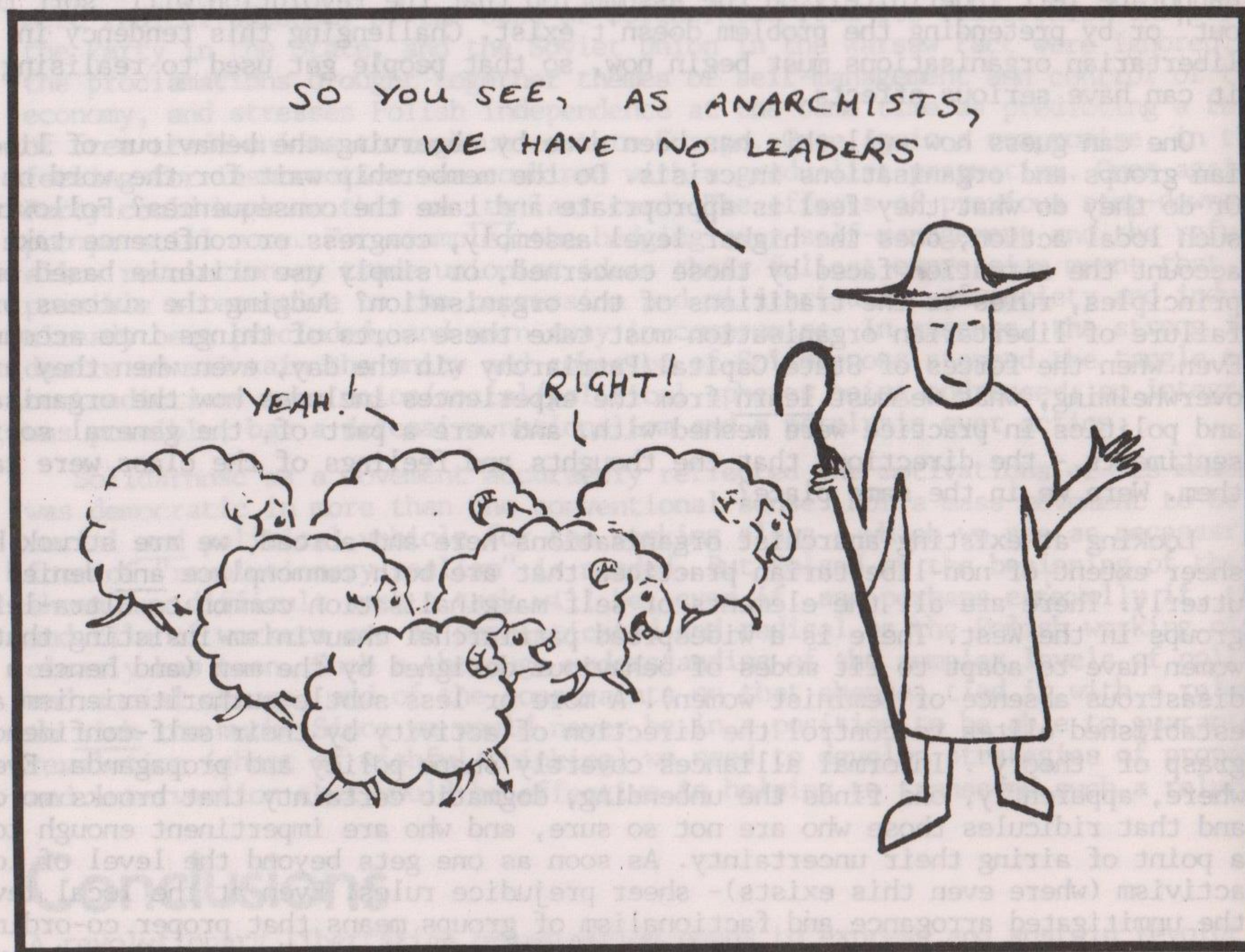
These tasks demand the generalised, active presence and involvement of the mass at all levels, initiating and carrying through action with autonomy and collective self-control. A structure split-off from the mass and seen as separate and mediating means that all that happens is that the people collectively become more passive, ceding more and more areas of decision-making to others in progressively wider areas of life. Once this process starts the officials of the organisation inevitably develop bureaucratically. This is subtle and indistinct at first (drawing even the most revolutionary among them into that role) and then accelerates as the developing passivity of the mass leaves them as the only ones prepared to make hard, immediate decisions. These developments are enhanced the more elitists and authoritarians there are in influential positions (not just those whose ideologies justify such traits). Whatever evolution the organisation has gone through before the crisis period, if it hasn't already dealt routinely with these problems of relinquishing power to active, respected comrades - a position will be reached of "leading militants" among a more or less sheep-like membership. These questions cannot be left indefinitely on the assumption that the revolution will "sort them out" or by pretending the problem doesn't exist. Challenging this tendency in libertarian organisations must begin now, so that people get used to realising that it can have serious effects.

One can guess how well this has been done by observing the behaviour of libertarian groups and organisations in crisis. Do the membership wait for the word on high? Or do they do what they feel is appropriate and take the consequences? Following such local action, does the higher level assembly, congress or conference take into account the situation faced by those concerned, or simply use criteria based on principles, rules or the traditions of the organisation? Judging the success or failure of libertarian organisation must take these sorts of things into account. Even when the forces of State/Capital/Patriarchy win the day, even when they are overwhelming, what we must learn from the experiences includes how the organisation and politics in practice were meshed with, and were a part of, the general social sentiments - the directions that the thoughts and feelings of the class were taking them. Were we in the same place?

Looking at existing anarchist organisations here and abroad, we are struck by the sheer extent of non-libertarian practices that are both commonplace and denied utterly. There are all the elements of self-marginalisation common to ultra-left groups in the West. There is a widespread patriarchal chauvinism insisting that women have to adapt to fit modes of behaviour designed by the men (and hence a disastrous absence of feminist women). A more or less subtle authoritarianism allows established elites to control the direction of activity by their self-confidence and grasp of "theory". Informal alliances covertly shape policy and propaganda. Everywhere, apparently, one finds the unbending, dogmatic certainty that brooks no doubt, and that ridicules those who are not so sure, and who are impertinent enough to make a point of airing their uncertainty. As soon as one gets beyond the level of local activism (where even this exists) - sheer prejudice rules. Even at the local level the unmitigated arrogance and factionalism of groups means that proper co-ordinated action with others is next to impossible. And people in the "movement" wonder why

we're not getting anywhere!

The following articles discuss various aspects of all this. From very varying perspectives the complicating realities of human associations are examined to see what bearing they may have on the ways groups and organisations are structured, develop and behave. We are not content with the notion (the wishful thinking) that anarchism as historically moulded is sufficient unto itself, that it covers all eventualities and can be consulted as divine wisdom for answers. On the contrary, we believe that this can never be the case. Many things are different now, in 1986. Anarchism has not kept up.



Chapter 2

Marketplace Politics: Competition among radical groups

Introduction

This discussion aims to analyze the way that groups derive their political aims and tactics. Some of the 'internal' (ie psychological, ritualistic, subjective, etc) aspects of group structure are discussed elsewhere in this pamphlet. Here, it is the 'external' social and political conditions which are of interest. These external conditions will be listed in preliminary form. After this brief ramble through the variety of factors that constitute the 'environment' in which groups operate, I will settle on one particular aspect: the diversification of political struggle and the competition between different members within that system. That is, I will focus on the fragmentation of the political domain and the way that this at once reflects, serves and undermines capitalism's dynamic. Political groups, including anarchist and libertarian ones, are necessarily caught up in the dynamic and the aim is to locate them within it. So, in this section, there will be an outline of the process, form and theorization of this political fragmentation. This discussion draws heavily on the marketplace as an analogy of the prevailing political 'scene'. The argument is, simply, that competition has a profound effect on the constitution of groups. The bulk of the rest of this text will be taken up with the the way that competition between groups is assimilated by them into their general political practice.

External factors: a preliminary list

The thing to note here is that the following list will be partly undermined in the discussion of diversification that will follow it. Nevertheless, it provides an overview of the sort of 'external' factors that are liable to shape the political activity of radical groups.

Infrastructure

This refers to the basic structures of Western capitalism - in particular the contradiction between forces and ownership of production, patriarchy and statism. These will affect the group in various ways.

(a) At the individual level they condition the array of personalities that can emerge. We can hypothesise that we all have an underlying character which will affect the type of politics to which we will be attracted. Thus Leninist or fascist groups might be thought of as serving an authoritarian personality. Possibly this personality structure also asserts itself in the emergence of covert power alliances in unstructured groups (see Ritual Anarchy for the way that this might be affected).

(b) The infrastructure creates class, gender and race related experiences which will condition the form of group structure. Thus working class organizations will reflect the collectivism of their social conditions. Conversely, middle class political organizations will tend to be more individualistic. Similarly for gender: it is no accident that CR groups were developed by women.

(c) The ends, as well as the structure of a group, are also influenced by infrastructure. Because of the range and diversity of interests that working class organizations have to express, it is not always obvious what the real interests of the class as a whole are. In comparison, capitalists have a shared and precise vision of their collective interests. As a result the latter find it easier to unify in the process of pursuit. To achieve the same sort of clarity,

working class organizations need some consultative process through which to draw on the experiences and desires of their membership. However, this is relatively 'wasteful' as regard time and resources. In consequence, there is a tendency to adopt the authoritarian structure of capitalist groups in order to place themselves on a par with them. As a result, working class groups tend to become opportunistic, subordinate means to ends, elevate short term aims, recruit to increase size irrespective of the quality of the membership, and so on. This is aggravated by the internationalization of capital. With the multinationals ability to shift investment becoming increasingly easier, states are forced to bid for the sake of their own stability. This means a crackdown on working class resistance which is often conducted via unions desperate to maintain membership. Thus the conflict between both national and international proletariats comes to be orchestrated by the multinationals.

Cultural Factors

These are not completely distinct from infrastructural elements, but are complexly connected with them. The division is for ease of exposition. (a) The role of family, education, etc provide the basic model for the structure of organizations. These will be predominantly hierarchical. However, because cultural experience is multi-faceted and contradictory, we can expect conflicting models. Thus the experience of informal, leisure-oriented groups which have a libertarian culture will conflict with more traditional models experienced at school. The 'respectability' or efficacy of these more radical structures will of course vary over time. But in recent times, they have re-established themselves in the form of, for example, miner's support groups. (b) The traditional hierarchy within the working class means that some proletarians are less subjectively proletarian than are others. This will affect the sources to which they look in formulating their political praxis, and ultimately their resistance or acceptance of their social and economic condition. (c) The state has not simply oppressed the working class, it has also mediated its reformist gains (eg Welfare). Currently these are being eroded. Because of the state's monopolization of so many resources, many groups are forced into dialogue with it; this requires that they remain within the legal framework. Thus groups are obliged to adapt themselves to the state's demands, in particular they are required to adopt given organizational structures (eg hierarchy, bureaucratization). (d) The expansion of the state has meant that it has increasingly infiltrated our private lives (a process partly legitimated by the social sciences - eg psychiatry, social work theory, criminology, etc). The state comes to have a major say in people's treatment of themselves and each other by furnishing, through its 'disciplines', the categories and practices by which people define themselves (eg decent sexuality, IQ, mental stability, etc). We might suggest that rationality is being wrested from ordinary people by a professional elite to the point that people begin to 'need' such an elite in order to formulate the problems they face. As such there might be some, historically circumscribed, truth in Lenin's idea that the working class can only achieve trade union consciousness.

Short-term conditions

Once again it is impossible to qualitatively separate these from cultural factors. What I have in mind are local, temporary changes such as the prevailing political climate (leadership), present struggles being waged (as opposed to the essential antagonism between capital and labour), the immediate state of the economy (up/down-turn). These factors people will often experience as 'new' or novel events within their lifetimes. The elements considered in preceding section (gender, class position, cultural backdrop, etc) are more or less taken for granted. Because of the novelty of these short-term factors we might expect them to unduly draw the group's attention. (a) General political climate will condition the limits of political debate and action. The right-ward shift in

Labour might induce similar adaptations in radical groups; alternatively, it might lead to a polarization. (b) Increase/decreases in funding/resources will affect the capacity of many groups to act, negotiate, recruit. An economic depression results in a situation in which energy is syphoned off by the simple need to survive. (c) The tightening of policing means that there has been an increase in surveillance, prying, coercion. Inevitably this will constrain the range and form of activities that radical groups can engage in. (d) Technological changes have also influenced the ability of radical groups to act. While the microchip revolution has improved surveillance techniques, it also offers the promise, with appropriate decentralization, of a more democratic dissemination of information and thus power.

Diversification: real and unreal

Multiplication

This section takes up just one factor of those described in the preceding sections, that of the multiplication or diversification of political effort. The aim is to show how this process has its own dynamic which has led to a stagnation rather than a flowering of political struggle. In the paragraphs that follow I will describe how this diversification has arisen.

The mass movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are less and less in evidence, or rather their coherence seems to have become more and more degraded. Instead of the more or less agreed upon point of revolutionary attack (generally, the workplace - the aim was to take control of the means of production. However, even then there was an awareness of the multiplicity of oppressions), there has been a sudden multiplication of these sites of struggle. Of course, the point of production is still a major focus, but it has lost its monopoly.

In the sixties, amidst the affluence of the west, revolutionary political emphasis, in some quarters at least, shifted away from production to consumption. What we consumed was beginning to consume us: it impoverished us, made us one-dimensional. Whereas previously it had been alienation and exploitation at the point of production that would provide the impetus toward revolution, now it was the poverty of an existence that had become dependent on commodity and spectacle. In the end some marxists (the Frankfurt School) saw the grip of this beguiling culture as so all embracing that they resigned themselves to the impossibility of major social upsets and retreated into aesthetics. Anyway, this new-found concern with consumption linked up with the ecological protest: changes in lifestyle and consumption meant that people could (partly) withdraw from the general ecological onslaught. The direction of attention outwards, from the social contradictions of capitalism to its global effects, was paralleled by an inward turning. Necessarily animated by women, personal politics became a substantive issue.

Personal politics, as we are all aware, revolves around power. In confronting that power, women were forced to change, to shed some of the aspects of the feminine stereotype, to affirm others. Furthermore, feminism introduced an additional infrastructural component: over and above production, capitalism had to accommodate reproduction. The new sensitivity to relations between and within individuals was echoed in the general re-orientation toward the self: the importance of discovering the 'real me', etc came to the fore and a plethora of therapies arose to cater for the wandering soul. As is to be expected, many of these genuine attempts to heal a self tarnished by power were swiftly recuperated by capital and the state (eg the consumption of therapies by the well-to-do who want to 'feel good about their well-to-do-ness'). Nevertheless,

within the right context, many of these attempts represented the fact that the self had now become a site for political action.

This expansion has involved all sorts of other struggles - race and gay issues being the most obvious of them. And at the local (residential, school, environmental, etc) level resistance has continued (although this will inevitably fluctuate with conditions).

But where do anarchist groups stand in all this? There can be no doubt that the diversification that has characterized recent radical politics has also permeated the 'anarchist movement' (for want of a better term). Anarchism has, of course, always been a rich and contradictory mixture, but the years of affluence have left their mark. Any reasonable radical bookshop will instance the diversity of perspectives: green anarchists, anarcho-feminists, libertarian marxists and communists, anarcho-syndicalists, mystical anarchists, animal liberationists, anarcho-artists, anarcho-christians. Then there are all the groups that are anarchist or have anarchist leanings but have not consciously placed themselves within the anarchist tradition.

A degree of specialization is inevitable. The problem arises when what is a specialism, or more accurately, a genuine though specific concern, is doggedly announced to be 'the only real issue'.

This diversification is nothing new to anarchists. Indeed, many anarchists, and Marxists, accept this in their stride. After all, we can provide the unifying theory that will tie all these disparate strands into a coherent whole. Next I want to look at the reasons for and the more dubious perceptions of this multiplication.

The problem with such an analysis is that it will reflect a political position, it can't be objective. The reasons for this multiplication can thus be cast in terms of two theoretical poles. On the one hand, it is asserted that there has been a profound change in the constitution of society; on the other hand, the claim is that there is only the surface appearance of multiplication. In the former the argument might run as follows: In the old days the working class were the political force; History ended when the proletariat realized its essence, overthrew the bourgeoisie and socialized the means of production. But now history is no longer driven by the motor of class struggle. Rather, it sputters along, nudged from event to event by the conjunction of forces such as the state, capital, scientific knowledge, the law, social services, the latest political ideology, etc). There is a real change here - there is no longer an economic infrastructure and a social superstructure for everything has become all mixed up, a morass of moments. This is not to argue that the classical confrontation between workers and capital is no longer possible; if the right conjunction of forces occurred, then this confrontation might again emerge and revolution would be a viable option. One of the factors behind this multiplication is the huge expansion of the state. As the state has wormed itself into more and more areas of our lives in its ceaseless attempts to shape and fix us, so resistance has had to confront it on more and more fronts. Multiplication has been the result. In contrast, the latter perspective sees this multiplication as relatively superficial. Certainly the state has expanded, but this has been in response to the ever more critical needs of capital (the economic motor is still the driving force behind society), not through the state's own intrinsic tendency to increase its power. Thus, through the medium of the state, the class struggle is fractured and disoriented. Whereas the former argument absorbs this multiplication into itself (sometimes celebrating it as 'molecular revolution'), interpreting the variety of struggles as inherently valid, the latter laments the fragmentation of the one true struggle, class war. Indeed, it might see such a process of fragmentation as ploy by capital to deflect the wrath of the oppressed.

However, perhaps we should not see these two positions as being polar absolutes. They are bound to reflect their own peculiar historical context. Thus the economistically-oriented view emerged in the Victorian-age when exploitation and the stark contrast between bourgeoisie and proletariat was all too evident. In the sixties, this began to be eroded, at least superficially. The welfare state eased some of the suffering, relative affluence began to blur some of the class status and earnings differences. Even the theoretical differences (ie bourgeois meant you owned the means of production; proletariat meant that you sold your labour power), were unsettled by the substitution of management and shareholder funds for the classical entrepreneur. Moreover, the massive rise of the service middle class didn't help clarify matters. So, in the post-war world a variety of factors have congealed to obscure what had been, at least in theory, a neat class division. If the view of the social world as multi-layered and many-pronged has prevailed in recent times, it seems that this itself might now be under attack. The new wave of economic crises have reminded us, or those of us who forgot, of the irrationality of capitalism, of its tendency toward crisis. And with crisis, class distinctions have sharpened up as recent industrial legislation and the state reaction to disputes amply demonstrate.

If we accept that there is currently a re-emergence of the economic, it could be argued that the multiple-factor perspective might result in a diffusion of radical effort. Class is of the essence under conditions of crisis, and many battles with the state are more openly class-related (as, for example, international capital forces states to provide congenial conditions for investment). And yet, many of the radical groups engaged in such struggle fail to see the class implications (eg radical feminist, ecological, anti-psychiatric groups). That is, much radical activity does not in fact see itself as addressing this sphere. However, this should not detract from the inherent validity of these fights against power, both internal and external. They break up the feedback loops whereby the state mediates (as well as sometimes resists) the needs of capital. In effect they challenge the primacy of the economic: they can act as a brake on any simplistic return to the old economism.

The reader will have detected a note of uncertainty: I oscillate between economic/singular and state-cultural/multiplicity models. This tension can't really be avoided because, when we come down to it, it's not really possible, or rather, reasonable, to choose between the two. As models they fulfil different functions, and come to the fore as those functions emerge in the process of political praxis. The questions now become: what sort of functions are created and perceived? How are these models -used-?

As we have hinted, the contrast between economic/singular and cultural/multiple is an artificial one. For example, there are plenty of groups who deny the primacy of the economic, yet adhere to a singular model. Their views are infected by an absolute certainty for they see themselves as having privileged access to the way the world works; they announce that their way is the only true way. Now this posture allows for a greater ease of directed political action - there is no place for second thoughts and critical reflection. By comparison, to have adopted a pluralistic view necessarily makes any action uncertain; its 'truth' can only be relative. Again this division is not so clear in practice: the presence of separate individuals in 'singular' groups will lead to differences of opinion, though often these will be stifled for the sake of group consistency; when 'multiple' groups are faced with a practical problem that needs immediate action, then reflection is usually tempered by necessity (eg the 84/85 miner's strike: the importance of supporting the strike meant that many people had to effectively suspend criticism of its suspect origins).

Marketplace Politics

What I now want to consider is how the singular versus multiple views have both mediated and been conditioned by a particular aspect of the environment in which they circulate. That aspect is the diversification/multiplication of political groups. It is argued that through this some of the concerns of the market have infiltrated radical politics. Political groups are in competition with one another for the hearts and minds of their potential audience/members/target group. Even anarchist groups, despite their avowed dislike of recruitment, have to engage in this competition. Anarchist groups, because of their minority status, are inevitably parasitic on larger movements (eg CND) or events (eg miner's strike). As a result they are forced to 'market' their own views to draw members, protesters, strikers away from orthodox political ideas and activities (appeals to parliament, marching, petitioning) to more radical perspectives. The most traditional way of doing this is by asserting that your views are absolutely right and everyone else is wrong. When we are told that Brand X is better than its competitors, this is demonstrated not so much through its outstanding performance as through the certainty (whether that be portrayed with vehemence or subtle rhetoric) with which its superiority is asserted.

The same goes for political groups: the actual arguments become secondary to the conviction that they are right and the power with which they are projected. This hard-sell marketing ploy is not simply the form in which the 'product' (ie the ideology, analysis, programme) is presented, it also works back to condition the very nature of that ideology. It is not as if activists are the political equivalent of advertising executives. Whereas the latter are aware that they are marketing crap, the politico is assuredly not. S/he is far too close to the material, is necessarily and rightly emotionally involved with what s/he has to say. But the dourness that this leads to amongst some groups (the vision of the paper-seller, hunched back and shifting from foot to foot, shouting 'Smash the Tories' or 'Fight the Cuts' comes to mind) undermines their effectiveness. They suffer the same fate as hard-sell advertising; they become caricatures of themselves. But advertisers cottoned on to the limitations of the hard-sell: it smacked of a sort of juvenile paranoia and put off the buyers. Now we have a distancing from the product, achieved through oblique description and recommendation, even an element of self-parody. The result is that the claims made for the product are not to be taken too seriously. It is no longer the lauded excellence of the product that impels the buyer to buy; rather it is the buyer's own good taste. That makes the choice all the more convincing. The major political parties have latched onto these techniques - they are of course largely distanced from what they say: manifestos are first and foremost vote catchers and most parliamentarians are well aware that the art of holding political office is knowing how to compromise while making it appear that one has been true to one's overt ideals.

Things are different for radical groups. The competition of the 'political marketplace' has contrived to lead radical groups to adopt hard-sell methods. (Their sometime humour is not the equivalent of soft-sell insofar as it is often only be appreciated by the converted). Why then does the hard-sell persist?

Hard-sell, in the realm of politics, involves (and this is where the analogy with the advertising industry gets a bit too tenuous) a commitment to the 'product' (ie the ideology, the programme, the direct action). That commitment is one of the things that keeps groups together in the face of competition from other groups. In their embattled positions, commitment helps maintain the integrity of both group and message. And yet it is this commitment, expressed in the hard-sell, that helps sustain the conditions for gross competition between political groups, which in turn necessitates commitment to the group which in turn generates the hard-sell and so on and so on. Thus we have a circularity, if

not a spiral: the substance of the market is transported into the 'radical community' where it serves to undermine any 'unified' revolutionary potential. I am not seeking a unification in which differences are somehow dissolved in the flow of a generalized love for one's fellow human beings. Rather, I am thinking of a minimal level of communication which allows others to have their say without being shouted down, whether that be overtly or privately, in the chuminess of one's group or in the cosiness of one's head. As things stand now the market continues to operate in its infamous way: the consequent in-fighting and vindictiveness diverts energy away from the actual enemy. In terms of our advertising analogy, the enemies of Brand X soap powder are no longer dirt and stains, but Brands Y and Z. In the terminology of Marxist economics, the use value of a political position (eg its capacity to inflict damage on capital, state, patriarchy, etc) is corrupted by (one aspect of) its exchange value (ie whether it is more attractive than other positions).

In brief: competition acts to drive groups and their members into the corner of certainty - a certainty which might at first be only superficial, for the purposes of the sell, but which in time comes to resound in the make-up of both groups (their internal structure) and members (some form of authoritarian psychology). As regards structure, certainty assures that the prevailing organizational form becomes unquestioned: the vanguard party, the CR-type group, the bottom-up assembly, are the -only- means by which to assert the politics. They become absolute structures whose usefulness does not alter with changing conditions.

The paradox here is that this rigidification in fact secures the group's future. Certain types of individual will be attracted to the group (by virtue of their specific psychological and situational circumstances) and keep up its numbers. The survival of the group and its ethos is assured by the necessary minimum turnover of members. But, as a partial result of this, the express aims of the group - to expand membership, to disseminate its ideas in such a way that they are 'absorbed' and acted upon by its 'audience' - is never achieved. In other words, competition in radical politics does not have the same outcome as it does in economics. In the latter, unless a company's profits continue to rise (or attain the average rate of profit) it will perish as a distinct entity. Not so with political groups: as long as they have sufficient members (and here 'sufficient' can mean a membership of one) then the group continues. In the political domain, competition takes place on a psychological as much as a material plane. Importance shifts onto the necessity to advertise, to attack, to fight other groups (as well as state and capital). As we suggested above, one element in this is the maintenance of a purity of message and form: keeping a distinct character allows for that minimum level of marketability that will attract 'sufficient' numbers for group survival. So long as the group is in the process of struggle, then it is achieving something, even if, in actuality, it is not; or else, is achieving something retrograde.

Summary/conclusion

To summarize: the process of diversification, with its potential to create a series of parallel and sympathetic (or synergetic) struggles on a variety of levels, simultaneously sets up the conditions for competition between groups. Moreover, as we have seen, this competition is, at the level of political praxis (even if less so at the level of theory at which 'intellectuals' happily trade concepts and ideas) results in a stagnation. What could have been fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas and, more importantly, activities, emerges as a stable fragmentation, a tense network of counter-camps, seething suspicion and certainty, each competing for supremacy of a sort, but ultimately all competing for competition. Where this stagnation does break down is, of course, when an 'easily and globally identifiable' enemy presents itself.

However, even in the middle of one of the worst recessions in recent history, this enemy is becoming less and less likely to appear as the rigidification of perspectives becomes more and more set. Of course, history changes and this process might be halted or reversed.

This is a pessimistic note on which to end, and I can't really prescribe any remedy other than in the most general terms. The obvious, and admittedly facile, suggestion (one which echoes the spluttering end of 'Ritual Anarchy') is that, now that there is no 'obvious' point around which to mobilize, there should be a redirection of effort away from differentiation and rigidification. Instead, energy should be expended on a blurring of edges: groups should begin to listen, discuss and experiment with other groups, even if this means (temporarily) setting aside the tenets on which the group founds itself. The problem is that this assumes that groups play fair. Unfortunately, 'stronger' (eg large, ideologically more virulent, etc) groups will be less likely to give up their share of the cake - they will tend to overwhelm weaker groups. Another problem is that the gains made by the individual groups might be counteracted by the decrease in diversity in the radical movement as a whole. For, at the very least, diversification and a clarity of group identity allows a range of positions from which to launch valuable criticism of alternative postures and tactics. What seems to be needed is intrinsically contradictory or, more accurately, dialectical - both cooperation and competition: a process of critical dialogue and qualified joint ventures. The aim is to eradicate the crass competitiveness of radical political groups and to replace it with critique, even sympathetic critique. Trots are not inherently evil swine; to class them as such is to fall prey to the pettiest machinations of capitalism.

Finally, it is important to stress yet again that the analysis I've presented is both too abstract and too partial. I've not really presented any concrete evidence for the processes of fragmentation other than in broadest fashion. However, despite this, my conviction is that fragmentation is a genuine process and must be faced. More important is the partiality of this analysis: as I stated at outset, there are innumerable other 'ecological factors' that influence the activity of radical groups. All I can claim is that the processes described in this essay do influence political action, and though they are often diluted by other factors, it is important that we recognize them in order to combat them, even if at the moment a thoroughgoing attack is unlikely.

Practical Anarchy

Finding a way forward

Although most anarchists could give a reasonable description of the basic forms of organisation which we want to promote (eg. accountability, instant recall, etc) we need to go beyond these generalisations and take an honest look at how our ideas would really work out in practice. What there is of anarchist organisational theory to date tends to deal in over-simplified, black and white concepts applied to a world in which people are totally rational, separate and consistent units, fully conscious of their motivations and in no way affected by such things as the fact that they personally don't like the person putting forward a certain idea. These ideal comrades never reach a decision just because they are bored and want to move on to something else and (of course) never get tired of attending endless meetings to take part in organising the self-managed society.

If then, as I believe, it is necessary to work out a more detailed and realistic idea of what 'organising along anarchist lines' means, the way to do this is to attempt to apply our ideas in practice and see what does and doesn't work.

Before we can do this though we need to know what we are essentially aiming for as anarchists, especially given the large number of anarchists in Britain today who are promoting the ridiculously naive idea that 'anarchism means no-one can tell anyone else what to do'. If anarchism is to regain the central place it once had in the working class movement we have to clearly and precisely distinguish ourselves from such misconceptions. That is what I hope to do in this article.

Another advantage of clarifying the essential core of anarchism is that it helps us to identify the important aspects which separate our outlook from those of other political tendencies (eg Marxism), so that we dispute the points which need to be disputed rather than arguing over things which should be accepted as common ground. This attitude acknowledges that anarchism grew out of a certain political tradition, rather than just popping up in someone's head one day with a label saying 'This is the Truth' on it. In reality, I would suggest, anarchists turn out to have basically the same 'shopping list' of demands as the Marxists do (at least in theory) but by giving these demands a different emphasis we end up with a very different practice. More on this later.

The problem of authority

Anarchists can be defined fairly simply as people who believe that authority is the main cause of the world's problems, as opposed to Marxists who also recognise authority as one of life's problems, but are quick to drop such safeguards as rotation of delegates, for example, if this starts to look inefficient. For me, the essence of authority is: the ability to deny another person's perceptions.

To expand on this seven word definition a bit, I would start by saying that by "a person's perception" I don't necessarily mean something very rational and calculated, rather I take the phrase to mean the sum total of conclusions they have reached about 'life' as a result of their experiences and observations. To bring it down to earth a bit, in any particular situation someone's 'perceptions' could amount to their point of view, what they think matters or even something as immediate as the back pain they are experiencing as a result of whatever they are being made to do. Also this definition of authority does not just work in terms of individuals, it could also be applied to the denial of the perceptions of a whole class by a ruling elite.

To take some examples, certain drugs get banned in the western world because they are dangerous, so the drug companies sell their stocks on the third world with the racist assumption that such persons' experiences/perceptions (of pain, side effects, etc) can be ignored (ie. denied). Someone stacking cans in a supermarket is told to do it in a certain way by the management who refuse to listen to their complaint that this will make the job more tiring. The stacker's perceptions don't count. Millions of pounds are spent broadcasting radio 4, but unless you have middle class perceptions (and an appropriate accent) you will have a hard job getting on it, except as a stereotype or the subject of a professional advice-giver. Your perceptions have been suppressed (ie denied). And so it goes on.

One conclusion which can be drawn from these examples is just how bad authority can be because, in denying a person's perceptions you are basically denying that their experiences matter or, in other words, turning them into an object to be used. In this sense, alienation is at the heart of an authoritarian relationship. Without an element of alienation the division of labour between manual and organisational work need not be oppressive, in fact it could be a case of communication between two equals. This alienation can, of course, also be inflicted using social pressures, dogmas and a whole battery of mental coercions as well as physical ones.

Anarchy without absolutes

If authority is about alienation then anarchism, by contrast, means getting participation and dialogue, with the essence of real dialogue (as opposed to just conning people into accepting your ideas) being for people to respect each others perceptions.

If we try and apply this idea in the absolute sense we run into all sorts of problems, as I hope to show. However I don't see this as a problem for 'my' definition of anarchism. What I have done so far is define anarchism from a philosophical/moral point of view. To develop a political definition of it we need to look at the best way of getting as near as possible to this philosophical ideal in a world which consists of relative good and bad, paradox and inherent limitations on how near to perfection a group of human beings can get. The 'problem' is only a problem for people who try and see the world in terms of absolutes.

Problems of participation

Literally complete participation by everyone in a group would indeed be an achievement, but before we consider that it is worth pointing out that such a thing is not necessarily a good thing, depending on what you mean by the word 'participation'

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Obviously someone whose perceptions lead them to think they should drive on the wrong side of the road could not be allowed to participate in society on that basis. Perhaps extreme examples such as this would be rare, but it illustrates a problem which shouldn't be ignored (though many anarchists try to do so), namely that on thousands of day-to-day issues (eg. what is the best time of day for a road to be dug up so that some new drains can be laid) there will not be an, obvious, common sense answer and some people will hold strongly to ideas which the majority find unacceptable. On the question of drains, say, some compromise could no doubt be found between the commuters who want the roads open in the early morning and the residents who work shifts and so need to sleep in the early afternoon, etc. What, though, if one shift worker (despite the fact that the decision was democratically arrived at and it has been fully explained to him that there is no alternative) gets so pissed off that he storms out of his house and starts smashing up the sewage pipes. To be practical, someone would probably have

to physically stop him which, in absolute terms, is authoritarian. It's also inevitable. The safeguard in an anarchist society would be that the original decision was taken by an assembly of everyone affected and the person who intervened would be held accountable to this same assembly after the event. I would be happy with this, but it falls short to the literal interpretation of 'No Authority'.

Obviously we have to be very careful about defining someone's behaviour as 'unacceptably anti-social' especially as such 'deviants' may be the geniuses of tomorrow. However, even such basic anarchist slogans as 'Freedom to the extent that it doesn't impose on someone else's freedom' recognise this compromise with reality.

One important guide should be that this attempt to modify anti-social attitudes should take account of the personal perspective of the person involved (perhaps by considering their psychological history) rather than just dealing with them like an object by locking them away and filling them full of sedatives as happens today in prisons. This attitude (which comes back to respecting other people's perspectives) would prevent 'because I say so' (the standard authoritarian's 'explanation') being replaced by 'because the assembly says so'. In other words there would be a genuine communication between members of the collective based on a day to day shared experience and communication, though this is obviously a lot harder to achieve at higher levels of co-ordination. Still, the cultural side should not be ignored as if people don't 'speak the same language' no organisational form is going to stop authority developing.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERCEPTION

Those who still cling to a simplistic interpretation of anarchism would do well to consider the details of how a person forms a perception of life. Obviously someone could have a head full of slogans and cliches that they picked up at the last party rally they went to without having very much in the way of a political perception of their own. So, as well as people having anti-social perceptions, they might not even have many perceptions which could rightly be called their own.

What anarchists are trying to promote is the idea that people should think for themselves. To put it more accurately they should think 'through' themselves, which acknowledges that our ideas come from interaction with the society we live in. On this basis traditions and customs need not necessarily be rejected by our so-called independent individual, but can be taken on board if they mean anything to them in the light of their own experience. In other words things should be more open to question, but this begs the question of what characterises a person who is genuinely thinking through themselves. This is a central question when, in our part of the world at least, the state tends to hold power not so much by direct coercion as by manufacturing and manipulating people's reality through a whole host of 'political commentators', experts, social workers, etc.

For example, a lot of people who don't clue in to the right way to ingratiate themselves with the teacher, etc, get labelled 'thick' at school and have it drummed into them that they are inferior to people who can use long words. Even though these long words are usually just so much waffle a lot of people do believe that they have a real value and give the person using them a status which the far more desirable skill of 'straight talking' does not.

Obviously, as anarchists, we attempt to resolve disagreements by discussion, that is to say by respecting the other person's opinion even though we disagree with it, at least as long as they are not out and out reactionaries. But is there ever such a thing as a free and equal meeting of minds when everyone is carrying around with them a mass of conditioning which tells them that long words means clever, aggressively confident means well-thought-out, emotional means unstable, etc. Is it ever possible in absolute terms to think things through yourself?

Given all this it's simply not possible for someone to say 'Right, I'm going to be an anarchist' and just do it. No matter how they structure their relations in the present they are going to keep running up against the consequences of historical conditioning which makes people too embarrassed to speak in meetings, admire firm leadership, etc and which give certain people an inbuilt cultural authority over others. It's no solution to say that you will refuse to take up the position of authority as to a large extent it does not need the assistance of an individual will to have its effect. If someone has been told since their first day at school that people who use big words are smart they will still be over-awed to some extent and create an authority imbalance even if one isn't inherent in the new system they've found themselves in.

'Using big words' is a fairly obvious example which is not impossible to avoid or expose, on the other hand it's not necessarily easy as it functions on the unconscious level to a large extent and is mixed up with people's self image and other such things into which they've invested a lot of emotional energy. As a result, someone could easily get the impression that you're saying they're thick when in fact you're saying they're not. Anyway, there are plenty of far more subtle ways in which people's perceptions of reality are twisted so that they get to know their place and recognise who are the confident and successful types. This may lead to resentment and avoidance rather than admiration but even this less self-effacing response results in a loss of influence as you can't decide how a group is going to develop if you don't go to the meetings or sit at the back thinking what bastards the people on the platform are.

Cultural conditioning is incredibly subtle and significant, but gets largely ignored in anarchist theory. It forms another reason why the total abolition of authority is not literally possible.

A POLITICAL BALANCING ACT

While we're on with the problems of trying to achieve total participation it's worth mentioning what seems to be a constant phenomenon in any organisation, and that is the fact that you can get too much of a good thing.

Accountability may seem like something you couldn't get too much of but in trying to promote this I have on occasions ended up being criticised for being too bureaucratic, and quite rightly! Obviously the present system is desperately short of accountability and needs a good dose of 'mandated delegates subject to instant recall' (preferably a lethal one), but this could lead to its own problems. Who wants to belong to an organisation where every sentence that gets uttered is met by 'excuse me comrade, I think that contradicts a decision made by this assembly on 3/8/86, see minutes, paragraph 3, page 19'. There needs to be a balance between accountability and spontaneity if the organisation is going to attract anything apart from Lenninist daleks.

Similarly, a useful and clarifying theory can become a dogma, decentralisation can lead to injustice through relative privilege, etc. A lot of anarchists have simply ignored this need to balance contradictions and gone full steam ahead with their simplistic cliches which they describe as a theory of organisation. They may have fooled themselves, but not other people.

In fact, it will never be possible to completely remove the kind of authority which comes from lack of participation without grossly inflating the kind created by the growth of bureaucracy, and likewise for all the other pairs of contradictions. All we can do is work for a constantly shifting dynamic balance which minimises the amount of authority present. In this our anarchist principles do not describe the end goal but are more like a compass which tells us in which direction we need to turn next to avoid drifting into new forms of authority.

As no principle is absolute this means we could well have to take up what could appear to be contradictory positions over a period of time. We might start by pushing for more decentralisation within an organisation but if this went too far we could conclude that more co-ordination was needed to prevent selfish actions on the part of one group making life impossible for the rest, eg by refusing to share out their bumper harvest with the regions which have worse conditions for growing food.

This pragmatic approach (by which I mean judging the value of an idea in terms of how it works out in practice) need not lead to unscrupulous opportunism if it is genuinely aimed at a desirable end goal, ie increasing the level of participation. This could however lead to problems of the end justifying the means, but if participation is the end this can serve as a means in itself to some extent. Another useful safeguard against the kind of convoluted manipulations the bolsheviks got up to would be a healthy scepticism which would make people dubious about the infallibility of the party's dogma which led it to justify what seemed to be massive steps backwards in terms of some supposed future advantage.

What a difference an 'a' makes

One convenient way of labelling the ideas I am trying to put across here is to change the word 'Anarchy' (which is popularly taken to mean 'no authority') to 'Minarchy' with the significance that a minarchist is someone who, like an anarchist, fights against all forms of authority but also realises that they can only be minimised, never fully abolished. My aim here is not to propose an alternative to anarchism, simply to create a useful handle, such as 'The tyranny of structurelessness' which allows a series of ideas to be summed up quickly if someone wants to refer to them in mid sentence.

This minarchist stance opens up various useful options in terms of organisational forms which I will now go on to sketch a few examples of in the last section of this article. Although many anarchists say that they have already incorporated the basic assumptions of minarchy in their present definition so the whole thing is an unnecessary fuss it will be interesting to see how many comrades still cry 'heretic' in response to the practical conclusions which can logically be drawn from these ideas.

Some practical considerations

Anarcho-nutters

Some people may dispute the need for a re-vitalisation of anarchist practice but I personally think that the antics of your average 'banner waving' anarchist armed with their arsenal of absolute truths has been an absolute disaster in terms of ordinary people's perceptions of what anarchism means, basically because they don't mind being extremely authoritarian in order to sort out the problems their idealism has created as long as they don't have to admit that's what they're doing.

One typical example of this I encountered was an anarchist centre where, to achieve absolute absence of authority people were trusted to pay for any books they took by putting money in an open box. When it became obvious that money was being pinched by someone, one bloke, whose position in the unofficial hierarchy of attractiveness and social skills was not very high, became a scape goat and was ejected on the basis of such 'evidence' as he was looking suspicious, etc. No doubt this is what they would have called 'direct action by the mass assembly', if so give me Lord Scarmen any day!

Some useful possibilities

One advantage of a minarchist approach to organisation is that we can take on board a whole series of organisational structures which will probably have the effect of reducing authority, rather than turning our nose up at anything but the sure and certain absence of authority (or, more usually, the appearance of this).

This could provide a solution to one of the most telling, and least discussed, limitations of a self-managed society, namely that attending meetings tends to get a bit boring. Even though a lot could be done to make meetings less boring, no-one wants to spend their whole lives discussing the ins and outs of how society is to be organised when they could be admiring the sunset, sipping a chilled martini/bottle of newky brown, etc. Anyway, the simple limitations of the human brain, ear or eye mean that we could never process the vast amount of information we would need if we were going to have total control over every aspect of our existence - the literal consequence of 'nobody tells me what to do'.

So, rather than every member of an assembly being involved in making sure that it's delegates are carrying out their mandate as instructed all that's needed is the possibility (which is equivalent to a certain probability) that their activities may be communicated to the assembly, to make them a lot more likely to do what they're meant to. The beauty of this is that an effect (ie. control over delegates) had been achieved without any effort having to be made. The possibility of access has been as effective as actually getting access would have been - as long as this access does occur from time to time. In terms of practicalities this means we don't have to get ourselves a name as total pedants by expecting to go through the detail of everything the organisation is doing. It is enough to create the kind of structures and (just as important) the kind of culture which give rise to suitable attitudes, so that generally speaking people can and do take an interest in how things are run. (Assuming that they've already acquired the power to effect changes in the light of their discoveries).

In such a system it wouldn't matter that I didn't want to get involved in the finer points of how Opera tours were organised, I would know that there was probably some committed amateur somewhere preventing it from being stitched up by an elitist clique. Similarly, as an artisan bricklayer, I would, once given the opportunity, make plenty of fuss about the state of my town's architecture. There would occasionally be overlap when the essential arguments were put before society at large by a variety of different groups for a decision on the general points, but to a large extent society would run itself.

There are problems with this system, a sort of pluralism of pressure groups, though to date the hub of such a system has always been an elitist parliament under the control of international capitalists, rather than a federation of workers' assemblies. Anyway, it is far more plausible than the simplistic 'Everyone would get together and talk about everything' approach which, as I've already pointed out, usually leads to covert forms of authority and has been responsible for putting so many people off anarchism.

A STATISTICAL APPROACH

One interesting possibility which working in terms of probabilities has is that it can make people more open to simple forms of organisation which will be egalitarian on a statistical basis at some future time. For example, if a group faces a situation where one member is leaving, it could be very difficult to persuade that person that they couldn't take with them anything in compensation for the work they had put in to the group. (Let's imagine that to do so would involve the whole group having to split up so that the fruits of their labour could be divided). On the other hand if the group made a decision to this effect when it started (and no-one knew who this person was that would

be leaving) there would be no personal bias involved. The group could see itself as a group, do what was best for the group and each take an equal risk that they would be the individual who lost out when the time came. Then, although the actual effect on the person leaving would be exactly the same, they would see it in a completely different context and be willing to accept that on an individual level it was 'just their bad luck'.

So, by dealing with the misfortune involved when it was still only a future possibility, the probability of it happening to each individual can be shared out equally in a simple system, rather than having to reach some kind of complicated compensation after a lot of argument in which people's knowledge of how any solution would affect them would make them biased and probably cause a lot of resentment.

My point is that a beautifully simple system can be found to solve a difficult situation if that situation is looked at in a context other than just that of being a concrete event in the here and now, even though what actually happens in the end is the same in both systems. In other words, even if you wouldn't want to adopt this particular system, we should never underestimate the subtleties of human communication and organisation.

Briefly, on to the classics

I'd like to finish by a brief (I stress that) look at the minarchist nature of some of the classic forms of anarchist organisation with a view to bringing their limitations (in the absolutist sense) out into the open. One essential point is that if authority can only be minimised then there will never be a time 'after the revolution' when we can relax our vigilance. To date anarchists have been unrealistically complacent about the difficulties involved in dispatching the hydra-headed monster of authority.

ROTATION OF DELEGATES

Someone once wrote that it is impossible to infiltrate anarchist organisations (in the context of Maoists trying to take over the CNT in Spain) on the basis that all delegates are mandated so they don't gain power if they capture key positions, just a lot of unpaid work. If only life were that simple! If being elected as a mandate delegate didn't give people a certain amount of power there wouldn't be any need to rotate them in the first place, but of course, in reality it does. No mandate can ever be complete, so there will always be a need for interpretation even before you allow for the fact that unexpected, urgent issues are always going to crop up. Many anarchists try to avoid the problems caused by events which need to be resolved too quickly for the assembly to be consulted by dismissing them as rare and therefore not too important. On the contrary, the importance of an event is more often directly proportional to the urgency with which it needs to be decided, in fact I would suggest that 'urgent events' and urgent decisions are the very ones which have historically led to the breakdown of anarchist forms in organisations which described themselves as anarchist.

What can be done about this? Firstly the problem should be recognised as a serious one then on this basis people might be willing to create the sort of fuss that would be inevitable if the assemblies nominal right to not ratify these decisions in retrospect is to be anything other than just rubber stamping a fait accompli. At this junction most anarchist theory doesn't even recognise that members of the assembly could easily find it difficult to contradict the decisions of 'leading militants' on the council of delegates. We need to build a culture which makes it easier for them to do so.

THE SOVEREIGN ASSEMBLY

A lot of anarchists talk about about groups within a federation maintaining complete autonomy but really this is a contradiction in terms. How can a collection of groups be said to be organised at the level of a federation if

that federation is never able to pass a decision which is any way binding on the groups which make up it's members? The expression becomes meaningless, in the same way that a group of individuals who do not surrender any of their autonomy to a group can not be said to be organised as a group - they just happen to be in the same building together.

While it is true that groups in an anarchist federation would have a lot of autonomy this could never be absolute. For example, the decisions made at congresses of the CNT are only seen as basic guidelines, not hard and fast rules, but any branch which goes against their central points is subject to expulsion. To me it seems obvious that a certain amount of authority would creep in under any system at higher levels (again, if this isn't the case why seek maximum autonomy in the first place?), so all we can try to do is minimise it.

This is not to say that I'm proposing some kind of 'minimum state'. The distinction is that in a minarchist system we would not reach a certain level of authority which was the least we could hope for and have to make do with that. Also the authority which did exist would not be split off into special institutions, Even if the state is totally abolished in the forms we recognise authority would remain to some extent in our everyday relationships mediated through our language, culture, etc.

LIVING WITH AUTHORITY

If, as I feel is inevitable, there will always be a certain amount of authority wherever people are organised in units of more than one this must lead to the rather startling conclusion that, along with the roads, education, energy policy, etc, when 'the people' take responsibility for running society they will also have to take on responsibility for handling the authority within it.

Up till now anarchists have, for obvious reasons, encouraged people to have one very simple response to authority - total rejection. If though, at some point in the distant future authority ceased to be something totally external, became something ordinary people had to handle with a view to keeping it as minimal as possible, then perhaps a more subtle approach would be necessary.

These days, for example, we are generally pleased when people get pissed off at the length of a queue and proceed to mutter to themselves, slagging off whoever organised it. In a minarchist society, where the person who organised that queue was someone who had stood in a similar one themselves the day before and perhaps had no alternative (at least deserves a bit of sympathy even if they have made a mistake) then a blanket condemnation of 'them in authority' could be a cop out compared to dealing with the individual concerned as responsible equals.

The above example, where the organiser wasn't strictly speaking in a position of authority, is difficult enough. The situation calls for even more subtlety when an element of authority does exist, but it is the minimal amount which at that point, at that time, can't be avoided. (If, for example, sorting out the problems with this queue created even worse ones elsewhere because of the time it would take up). A lot of discrimination would be needed to avoid lumping the minimal level of authority with any other level of authority and saying 'sod the lot of them'. To do so could only create a vacuum which, by definition of 'minimum authority' could only be filled by something worse.

These questions may be abstract at the moment, but the more successful we are the more they will arise, along with the reverse problem; not how to avoid going over the top, but how to confront a delegate who is becoming a boss if they also happen to be your friend or neighbour.

Summary

So, what is all this about? Basically I'm trying to get rid of the idea that life can be understood in terms of simple absolutes where some things are labeled as 'good' full stop and others as 'bad' full stop. In fact most characteristics have potential for both attributes. Spontaneity has a lot to be said for it, so does accountability with the result that if, as I suggest is inevitable, the two tend to contradict each other the only way forward is the pragmatic one of experimenting with the effects of different balances in practice. To me anarchism is essentially pragmatic as it defends peoples' right to assess received wisdom, dogma, etc in the light of their own experiences. Perhaps this is why anarchists are inclined to try and build the new world in the here and now. We want to get on with experimenting with it in practice.

If there is one thing we can't get too much off perhaps its participation and to me 'would this increase the general level of participation?' is the nearest we'll ever get to an acid test as to whether a course of action is advisable or not.

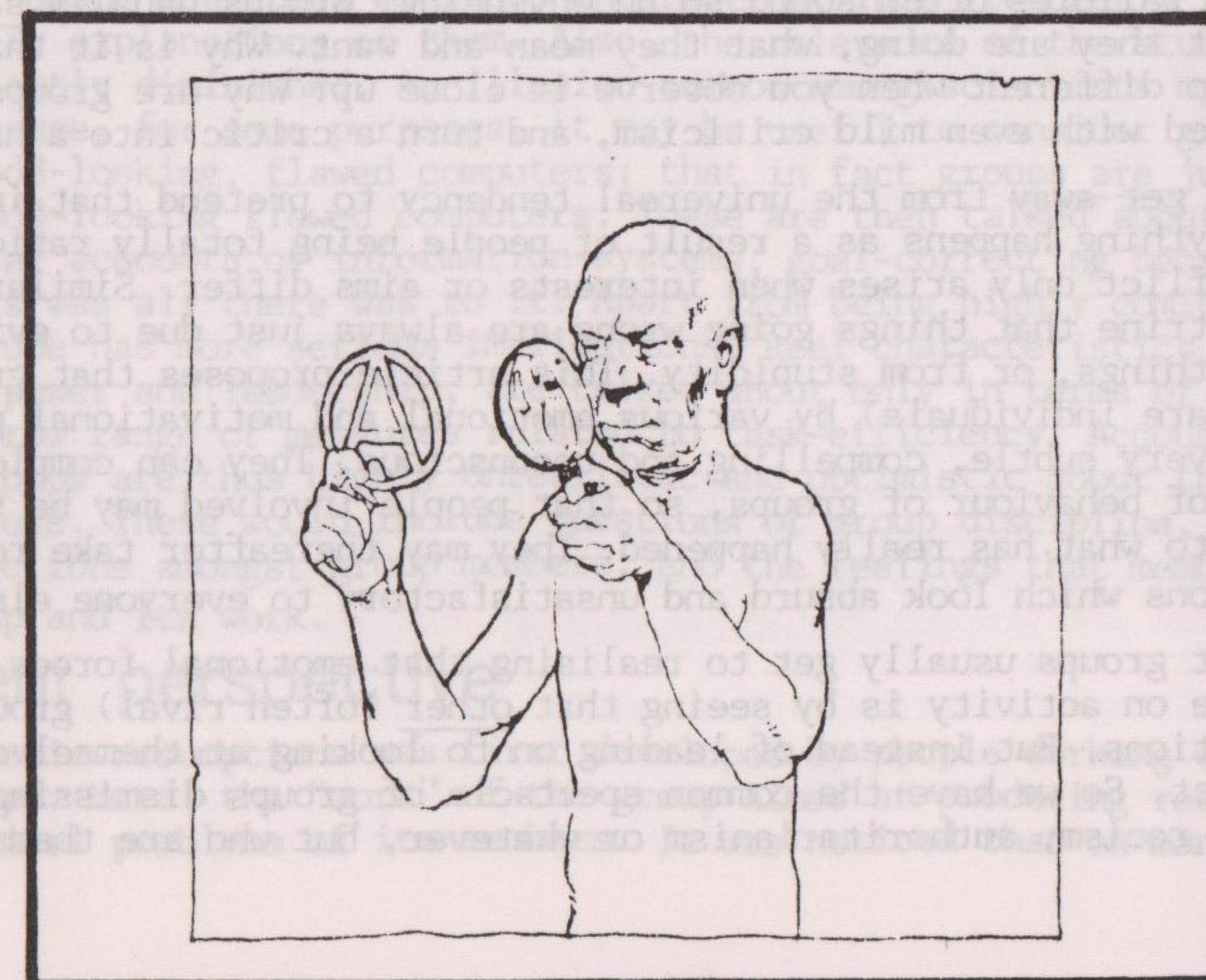
If anarchists would accept that progress is made by balancing contradictions not pushing one virtue to its absolute limits I feel we would have a much better basis on which to begin an honest assessment of how much different forms of organisation do achieve; where we need to make improvements and what those improvements might be.

Instead, groups of all kinds tend to set up a structure to do a certain job, eg increase participation, but not have the flexibility and honesty to constantly assess whether or not that job is being done and make any necessary changes. Authority is a slippery problem and minimising it requires constant vigilance and flexibility.

If, on this basis, we can go beyond the orthodox cliches of absolutist anarchism, it's just possible that a lot of ordinary people will start to realise how relevant the struggle against authority is in their everyday lives.

Mick Larkin.

(I'd like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance and criticism of the other members of L.O.S. in the preparation of this article.)



Non-Rational Politics: emotions in groups.

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Introduction

Why do the explanations by political groups of their activities and of their successes and failures often sound so unconvincing? Groups usually say quite a lot about what they are doing, what they mean and want. Why is it that what they do can seem so different when you observe it close up? Why are groups so defensive when confronted with even mild criticism, and turn a critic into a hated enemy?

We need to get away from the universal tendency to pretend that in political activity everything happens as a result of people being totally rational. From this view conflict only arises when interests or aims differ. Similarly we should avoid the doctrine that things going wrong are always just due to evil people doing wicked things, or from stupidity. This article proposes that groups are affected (as are individuals) by various emotional and motivational processes which can be very subtle, compelling and unconscious. They can completely alter the patterns of behaviour of groups, so that people involved may be totally mystified as to what has really happened. They may thereafter take refuge in trite rationalisations which look absurd and unsatisfactory to everyone else.

The nearest groups usually get to realising that emotional forces are having some influence on activity is by seeing that other (often rival) groups have hidden motivations. But instead of leading on to looking at themselves, it has the opposite effect. So we have the common spectacle of groups dismissing others for their sexism, racism, authoritarianism or whatever, but who are themselves

virtually incapable of dealing with their own sexist, racist or authoritarian tendencies. Usually it is denied that they exist, or accepted intellectually that they do as a way of avoiding doing anything about it.

From a different point of view the chapter on ritual in this pamphlet discusses some of the same areas. The other chapters cover subjects that involve many more issues, but all of these are related, in part, to the inevitable effects of emotional lives having unexpected, undesired and/or uncontrollable influences on all of our activity.

Parts I to III contain an outline of theory which opens the possibility of analysis of the effects of emotionality on groups. Part IV contains some very tentative explorations of how such theory can contribute to our understanding of real political situations. The huge wad of theory may look rather uninviting, but I felt it better to explain as precisely as I could what I meant before getting into its applications to real life. Nevertheless readers may prefer to start with Section IV.

Workgroups & the basic assumptions

Most discussions of the effectiveness of groups exclude from consideration the emotional nature of all human associations. We can draw a distinction between a workgroup and a basic assumption group. The workgroup orients itself towards specific aims, which are then addressed by more or less rational means. The basic assumption group, whatever its pretensions, can often chug along quite happily independently of its environment or of any relationship between its aims and achievements. The difference between the two kinds of group is only one of degree. In a basic assumption group strong shared emotions are usually more "visible". There is a sense of a "mission", a closeness between group members that is never verbalised. This may be what we mean by "solidarity". But workgroups can become basic assumption groups, either momentarily or for longer periods.

a) Investigating groups

Psychologists and sociologists have almost always assumed that groups can be seen as pure workgroups. Indeed they manipulate the structure of their experimental groups with the intention of approaching such an ideal. Measurements are chosen which, they believe, encompass the important aspects of workgroup function - communication, information, task-efficiency etc..

These strategies have had two general effects. Empirical studies fail to take account of the "human" qualities of group interaction. This frequently ruins their results, and their explanations of them. Also, the relevance of the studies to the real world is greatly diminished. An illusion common among scientists operates. This is that because, for some purposes, it may be useful to consider groups as collections of odd-looking, flawed computers; that in fact groups are just collections of odd-looking flawed computers. These are then talked about in terms of formal, logical accounts of information-systems, goal-correcting behaviour and so on, as if this was all there was to it. Apart from being highly comical at times this attitude has more serious implications. Real characteristics of real groups, such as power and leadership, are talked about only in terms of their effects on a narrow range of measures related to task-efficiency. Accounts of groups as workgroups are thus highly unrealistic and optimistic about the effects of critical factors. These would include questions of group discipline, the emotional interactions amongst group members, and the feelings that members have towards the group and its work.

b) A different perspective

The concept of basic assumptions was first developed by people working with small therapeutic groups. Here, the "work" of the group aimed at producing reductions in the psychological problems of its members. It was noticed that on many

occasions a group would exhibit rather bizarre patterns of behaviour. These would occur irrespective of how well the group was developing its capacity to fulfil the requirements of its work. These patterns seemed centrally to involve strong emotions within the group. They could be accounted for if the group shared an emotional assumption. This could be about particular group members, or the whole group, or about some less well-defined aspect of the group such as an idea or attitude. While active this basic assumption would have a major bearing on all that transpired in the group.

Whatever one thinks of the theory behind the hypothesis of basic assumptions (psychoanalytic theory), what was described in small therapeutic groups does seem to capture the emotional tone of groups in general. It has been developed and extended to apply to groups as diverse as couples and whole societies.

An analysis of group phenomena based on the idea of basic assumptions may offer a way out of the usual rationalist impasse. It could be very valuable to consider groups from this perspective, just as there may be some point in seeing groups as workgroups composed of emotionless, functional automata. In neither case should we judge the approach by how immediately satisfying we find the theory to be. Rather, we should see how fruitful it can be for any given purpose. The hypothesis of basic assumptions can be a starting point for an explanation of the emotional content of group activity that doesn't in effect deny that emotions will inevitably be central to human life. Plenty of other approaches pay lip-service to the idea of integrating emotionality into explanations of social phenomena - unfortunately lip-service is about the extent of it. What follows at least has the merit of consistently focussing on and emphasising emotions in groups.

c) Individual and group

Some aspects of an individual's psychology only make sense when seen in the group situations which are their relevant contexts. Being fundamentally social, humans are in groups even when isolated in time and space. In a sense humans are only complete as members of groups. But this does not mean that joining a group is effortless and unthreatening. On joining, individuals must experience, react to and play a part in shaping the emotional life of the group. If this is not done the individual will not feel part of the group. If done too well or completely the individual is submerged into the group and is then at the mercy of whatever emotional forces and fluctuations drive the group. There is a crucial paradox here. The more the boundaries of the self break down into the group (or the more the person identifies with the group), the more substantially will basic assumption processes usurp the work functions of the group.

Identifying with the group involves believing that there is something called "the group" more than just the sum of individuals. The identification means some loss of the feeling of individual distinctiveness. This leads to more difficulty in seeing the group as an aggregation of individuals. The illusion of "the group" is thereby bolstered. The idea that the group is somehow more than the sum of its members means that the emotional interaction characteristic of the group is not there in a mere aggregation. This is because in the latter individuals have not undergone the regression of identification with the group.

It is a very threatening feeling to begin to lose one's sense of individual distinctiveness. How this is responded to varies and depends very much on the mood of the group. The form resistance to identification takes depends on the individual's personality and on the structure of the group. Structure and organisation can protect the group against some of the dangers of personal power and authority, but are no barrier to the basic assumptions. At most, an organised workgroup is only relatively less easily submerged in basic assumption activity, and a basic assumption group functions irrespective of the formal or informal structures developed over its history. Similarly true co-operation (oriented to workgroup functions) is unnecessary when a basic assumption is active. A more

unconscious and spontaneous collective phenomenon operates instead, leading to automatic, instant, unverballed combined action centred on the basic assumption. The essence of this is the shape of emotional activity in the group. For each basic assumption the combination of emotions has a characteristic quality. For example what might be called anxiety in a messianic group has different emotional connotations from anxiety in a dependent group. In the messianic group anxiety tends to make members feel that they are not doing enough, that there is so much to be done. Whereas in a dependent group anxiety tends more to relate to the group's position with respect to its leadership. Or, in a hostile group, expressed emotions will tend to be tinged with anger or hate. In this case all group activity has a conflictual feel to it, pulled uncannily to a violent or extreme outcome most of the time.

When action is directed outside the group the real nature of the environment must be taken into account. But a basic assumption group is hampered in this, because the control over its activity depends on the demands of the basic assumption. The only reality the latter is concerned with is the emotional reality within the group.

d) Emotional leadership

Each basic assumption involves a group "leader". Having said this, in the messianic group the leader is as yet non-existent (i.e. "unborn"). In the hostile group the leader is usually identified as a particular individual. In the dependent group the leader may be embodied in a person or elite, an idea, the history of the group or in an inanimate object such as some kind of group bible.

"Leadership" in this special emotional sense does not necessarily entail a position in a structure or the organisation of an hierarchy. The term is kept here, despite its ambiguity, because the institutional power of a leader in the conventional sense will always interact with emotional leadership.

All basic assumptions will be latent in any group. So the potential emotional leadership for each assumption exists even when neither the assumption or its leader are active in that role at any given moment. The basic assumption group leader may vary over time, between different assumptions, and may or may not be effective in any sense. This person may or may not be the individual who is the formal organiser, administrator, leader or other role invested with delegated or imposed power.

Certain kinds of personality are especially suited to the roles of each basic assumption group leader. For example narcissists or hysterics are particularly easily drawn to the leaderships of dependent groups. Or, those with psychopathic or severely paranoid tendencies tend to become the leaders of hostile groups. The personalities of the leader and of the others in the group determine how "well" the leader can fulfil the requirements of the basic assumption.

Only one basic assumption at a time can be in evidence in the group's behaviour. However, the basic assumption active at any one time can change frequently - at the rate of several times per hour, or can remain unchanging for months or years on end. This applies whether or not the workgroup functions change at all.

Analyses of workgroups that ignore the basic assumptions will fail to give an accurate picture of what is going on. False lessons can be drawn from historical occurrences and present experiences. People are unable to see alternative explanations and are left with a choice of delusions. If any are chosen despite being so unsatisfactory they can only be sustained by dogma.

The basic assumptions

a) Dependency

The basic assumption of dependency involves the group's desire to carry on a relationship of mutual dependency with a leader. This leader could be a person, a subgroup or an idea or text identified as expressing the essence of the group. Dependency revolves around the emotional sustenance felt to flow between the group and its leader, in particular how aggression, fear and anxiety are handled.

GROUP SUPPORT

A dependency system typically goes through a two-stage cycle. At one stage the group members look to the leader to behave and talk so as to alleviate anxiety and provide reassurance. But sooner or later the group may no longer feel satisfied with what the leader does in this respect. Then the group may rapidly switch so that its predominant activity is now to sustain the leader. If at this point the leader is not felt to be a suitable object of the group's nurturance, a new leader is sought, perhaps corresponding to a change in basic assumption. If not, the new leader would be perceived as more adequately fitting the role of dependent on the group. Logically therefore, the leader would tend to be the most insecure or least-balanced member psychologically; since from the group's point of view there is little gratification to be derived from trying to sustain a leader who appears perfectly able to cope without such an effort on the group's part.

The group's effort to meet the dependency needs of the leader (the leader's "real" dependency needs plus those projected by the group into the leader) can come to tie up the whole energy of the group. When the cycle is stable the switch back to dependency on the leader comes when the group members feel drained or exhausted by their previous efforts. Now, the group members stop projecting into the leader their own dependency needs. Instead they project their ability to sustain a needy other, and expect to be taken care of by the leader. It goes without saying that the work of the group can only suffer under this regime, and the group will tend to become detached from its aims and environment as it absorbs itself with support and the need for support.

HELPLESSNESS

The most straightforward example of a dependency system is shown by religious groups, who often indeed recognise that the leader (the deity) is in fact insane. In general, any evidence that suggests that they are not each looked after by the deity is rejected. Similarly the group will not accept that the deity or its representative is rational or sane (euphemisms like "unknowable" are preferred). The paradox for the dependent group is that the group sees itself as totally inadequate or helpless, needing to be able to depend on an omnipotent, all-knowing leader. But then the leader is also seen as totally helpless without the vigilant care and attention given by the group.

Religious groups may express most aptly the situation where a basic assumption of dependency holds sway. But the analogy is clear with charismatic leadership and apocalyptic and fanatic groups as well as with populist movements of all kinds. It is not far-fetched to look for signs of dependency operating in all groups with certain sorts of purposes. Idealistic and revolutionary groups have aims which are more or less extremely divorced from current reality. Understandably, frustration and devaluation are widespread in such groups. They could be especially likely to develop dependency relations so as to be able to tolerate their very unpromising environments.

INSTABILITY

Under the basic assumption of dependency the "badness" of the group is (rightly)

seen as residing largely within the group. The group oscillates between seeing it as inherent in the leader and in the other group members. In the latter case it must be contained and healed by the leader, in the former by the group. As the cycle repeatedly passes the oscillations may become more rapid and violent, continually diverting attention from the reality of the group in its environment and its workgroup aims (if any of these have survived thus far). Obviously many factors influence the development of the group in such a context. The least that can be said is that the situation is very unstable, risking chaotic disintegration.

ABSORPTION

A stopgap measure to absorb the emotional reactions to these oscillations can be to recruit other individuals and groups. These others would not (at first) share the emotional situation. From the point of view of the original aims and tasks of the group, too many newcomers too quickly would be a threat through weight of numbers alone. With some groups though, the aims and purposes have already been substantially lost or reduced to superficial banalities (if indeed they were ever more than this). Such groups tend to survive only by continually expanding - which can seem to the outsider to be the only coherent identifiable aim. On the other hand too few new members would rapidly become infected with the pre-existing emotional turmoil within the group. There is no dynamic equilibrium in a system developing in this way. If the group does not break up it will simply transpose the underlying conflicts onto a larger scale. A switch to another basic assumption is more than likely to be all that prevents breakdown.

SCHISM

Another common tendency in a workgroup heavily influenced by basic assumptions is schism. If a group is to some extent a workgroup (ie not simply gripped by basic assumptions) then the group and its members must develop. This is almost the defining criterion of a workgroup. As its work progresses its orientation with respect to its aims and environment will have to change. The demands made on the group to change elicit resistance (we would rightly be suspicious of apparently effortless development). This resistance takes several forms, depending on the personalities of those involved. The most obvious form of resistance is for people to leave the group or for it to dissolve. Excepting this, two extremes of reaction are possible. One subgroup might resist change and promote loyalty to the status quo in the group. Tradition and the known and comfortable patterns are appealed to. In essence this subgroup wants to have no new or painful changes imposed on it. The emotional tone is one of stagnation and dependency. The quality of thought becomes lower, consisting mainly of generalisations and platitudes, and is basically reactionary.

Another subgroup supports a new idea, often acting on a messianic assumption. But the new idea becomes so specific or highly rationalised in the hands of this subgroup that it fails to grow or gain further influence. It becomes intense and sterile compared to the bland and conventional subgroup. Both subgroups end up fulfilling the same end - and avoid the sort of development necessary to the workgroup. One only has to glance at the history of left-wing groups to see the relevance of these observations. What usually happens is that the group splits into two or more mutually antagonistic groupuscules. The resulting groups may take on any of the basic assumptions, toward each other and in general. But they will usually be schismatic too, leaving the prospect of further splits, fractions and fragments that look so pathetic to the outsider.

Groups usually switch from time to time among the basic assumptions. This can be prompted or encouraged by events and external circumstances, or it can be wholly due to the internal emotional states of the group. Schism and absorption are more likely to result when both types of pressure are present, especially in crises. Schism is especially likely to occur when aggression becomes a prominent feature of group behaviour. Even more frequently, after schism the basic assumption

of hostility is taken up by one or both factions. Absorption is more often seen as a compulsive activity in dependent or messianic groups. When it is a characteristic of a hostile group major social violence is likely to result.

b) The messianic group

The second basic assumption, even more than dependency, relates to the aims and purposes of the group. In the dependent group the aims tend to become identified with the emotional leadership of the group. This happens whatever its implications are for the fulfilment of the aims in the real world. However in the messianic group the aims tend to be associated with diffuse and almost erotic feelings of hope and optimism. A future paradise is half-perceived that would satisfy all desire - in effect this outcome would abolish all negative experience and desire. In small messianic groups (and sometimes in larger ones) the most hope and optimism is felt in connection with the interaction of two or a few specific group members. These appear to the group to be potentially fertile and (re)productive in terms of the aims and purposes. The rest of the group may become more passive, basking in the pleasurable emotions experienced. In larger groups a subgroup tends to become split-off from the main group to deal with the emotions and effects of the messianic assumptions. Examples in large-scale groups might be think-tanks, aristocracies and any other elite which purports to carry the hope of the group.

HOPE AND OPTIMISM

Perhaps the central characteristic of the messianic group is that an illusion of messianic expectation is maintained irrespective of real achievements. Clearly, this can cripple the group's development as a workgroup as much as dependency can. Under dependency feelings of the "badness" of the group alternate between being applied to the group and to the dependent leader. Under the messianic assumption the product of the group's fertility is felt to promise salvation from all feelings of anxiety and despair, aggression, destructiveness and hatred. In this sense the badness of the group is held in abeyance. The emotional leadership is postponed to the future, remaining unborn but always looked-to. Optimistic rationalisations allow the group to defend against actually-occurring negative feelings which would otherwise threaten the messianic assumption. The bad feelings are displaced in time to a future when the fulfilment of the messianic hope would deal with them. Of course the negative feelings aren't really put off. In fact they remain unchanged - except that they are hidden, denied, avoided or suppressed. Sooner or later they can no longer be contained. Guilt is felt all along at the pleasure derived from the basic assumption, but the moral superiority of the "millenium" justifies the pleasure felt "here and now". The guilt is tolerated or avoided along with the aggression and fear.

AVOIDING SALVATION

In order for it to fulfil all of these functions for the group, the messianic vision must not be allowed to be achieved. If it was, the hope for it that binds the group together would evaporate. But there is always the danger that the group will move towards actually producing the messiah. This could be in the form of a person, idea, utopia etc.. The more this likelihood is felt to have increased, the more hope and optimism are replaced by anxiety, as the basis of the group is at risk. The negative emotions so far avoided in the group are more and more free to emerge. The resultant crisis in the group can be resolved by a switch to another basic assumption, or by sufficiently mutilating the messiah (or behaving so as to reduce the possibility of producing it) so as to recreate hope. If the messiah is not rendered less imminent it would tend to become the emotional leadership of a dependent group.

An excess of hope and optimism perpetuates itself because of the pleasure it

affords the group. It leads to compulsive, zealous, energetic behaviour. This can be so intense that it interferes with most realms of workgroup activity. Once established it is a convenient way of handling negative feelings, with the bonus of providing immediate gratification. Groups can become addicted to this mode of functioning. They can become more impatient, obsessive and rigid in their behaviour. This can easily be seen in their treatment of those who disagree with them, who are ignored or dismissed hastily. The messianic assumption may well not provide the opportunities for resolution which are present in dependency groups. Members become burnt-out and useless to the group (and to themselves). Alternatively members can come to pursue their habitual gratifications in ways more and more divorced from the group and its aims (eg decadence).

c) Hostility

The third basic assumption involves the way that aggression in the group is focussed. In the dependent group aggression is spent in the cycles of interaction between group and leader. In the messianic group aggression is denied and channelled into a dogmatic faith in the vision. But in the hostile group it assumes centre stage. The group's existence revolves around fighting enemies or fleeing from them, often not caring which it does as long as it is one or the other. The leader of the hostile group is taken notice of only insofar as he gives the group the maximum opportunity for engaging with the enemy.

HATE AND PARANOIA

The "badness" of the group can be treated in two main ways. It can be acted out collectively towards the environment. Alternatively it can be projected outward so that it is perceived as persecution of the group by some outside agency (or by all outside agencies). By these means, any aim that a workgroup might have can be perverted fairly easily to fit an aggressive and paranoid stance with respect to the environment. Perhaps this wouldn't be quite so bad if the hostile group was capable of being selective, and to accurately pick out those external groups who really were inimical to their interests. Unfortunately this is not so, and the whole environment tends to be seen as already or potentially the enemy.

Ideas of change or development are treated with hostility (as tricks of the enemy) or simply ignored. The stated aims and purposes of these groups become thinly-disguised rationalisations allowing the group to justify its aggression and hatred. These are felt to need a focus in order to protect the integrity of the group. The overt unleashing of aggression in hostile groups tends to be self-perpetuating, leading to totally conflictual relationships with outside agencies. Then the group can feel justified in its paranoid and violent behaviour. Apart from the strains this causes the group, the hostile basic assumption is usually very unstable. This is partly because for the non-psychopath it can be rather difficult to sustain the levels of sheer aggressiveness required by the group. The hostile assumption often leads to a literally vicious circle, where the level of violence has to escalate. A temporary solution can be to absorb other individuals and groups if the hatred for these can be overcome, but then there are even more aggressive individuals involved. At any time individuals or subgroups may begin to promote other basic assumptions, but these dissenters very quickly find themselves becoming the focus of the group's aggression. This will often be at an even higher level than before because now the enemy can be specifically delineated as "those individuals" rather than as hazy or generalised outsiders. Normally a certain vagueness about the nature of the enemy allows contrary evidence to go unobserved. But when the enemy is suddenly perceived as inside the group this is no longer so.

In small hostile groups attacks within the group tend to be toned down because all members know each other and are in close personal contact. But when the group becomes large this restraint easily disappears. Aggressive mobs are noted for their ability to turn on their own members in vicious and impulsive ways, for arbitrary

or even imaginary reasons. Infiltrators have a great deal of success in ruining group action that turns nasty by claiming that an innocent group member is a police spy etc..

PROSPECTS

Usually the most intractable problem with a hostile group is that there is no recognition that understanding or insight (or even thought of any kind) might offer a way out of the aggressive cycle. Even if anyone in the group has an inkling of this, saying so would be rather dangerous for them. Since everyone and all groups have many flaws, a reason can always be found to hate anyone genuinely wanting to help.

Since the aggression and violence is very resistant to being diverted or contained, violent rupture and disintegration is almost inevitable sooner or later. By then an enormous amount of indiscriminate damage can have been done. But even then the story is not over. The resulting fragments carry their aggression into whatever other groups they are, or become part of.

The hostile assumption is a constant temptation for groups in crisis, whichever of the other assumptions they have recently been influenced by. Given the real persecution that political groups face it is an ever-present option for those who cannot handle their inevitable frustration and aggressiveness. It can be an alternative to necessary change in the group.

Some implications of the basic assumptions

a) The group and its emotions

The basic assumptions express the regressed emotional state of group members losing their individual distinctiveness in the group. But the basic assumptions are not stable and cannot themselves contain the emotions of the group. This is because the regression itself recalls more primitive (psychotic) anxieties against which defences must be found. Thus the switch from basic assumption to basic assumption and the other forms of change (schism and absorption) represent attempts to defend against the intense anxieties evoked by regression. That they cannot often find equilibrium means that the primitive levels of emotional functioning are always likely to be a last resort. The most paranoid and persecutory group behaviour is the final stage before group disintegration. That represents, in emotional terms, psychic death for the group.

The group can therefore be viewed as a psychotic individual. The parts (members) identify by projection certain parts (certain members or others) as fulfilling a fantasied role of part-object in a regression to infantile modes of functioning.

The three basic assumptions are not exactly separate states of mind. They represent different facets of the regression involved in identifying with the group. In fact there are definite parallels between them. For example messianic hope and the group deity of the dependent group may look rather similar. The full extent of the similarity between aspects of the basic assumptions is masked by the considerable differences in overall emotional tone - guilt and depression in the dependent group, grandiose or sexualised hope in the messianic group and the anger and hatred of the hostile group.

b) Rationality and the fear of emotion

People often feel that emotions are stronger in groups and that "rational" functions suffer accordingly. This effect is primarily due to the fear of being taken over by the basic assumptions. This expresses itself in attempts to suppress

or avoid emotions surfacing. Since this is impossible for humans, the tension that results plays right into the hands of the basic assumptions. Thereafter, an important part of the "hidden agenda" of the group can be to maintain the fantasy that emotionality has been eliminated. Ironically this fantasy is now an expression of a basic assumption. All thought and words which don't fit the requirements of the basic assumption are ignored - hence the quality of the rational processes in the group appears to be lower.

c) Impossible rationality

At a more-or-less conscious level, all sorts of things are dreamt up to remove emotions from the scope of the group's work. These include compulsive hierarchy or legitimising arbitrary institutional power, as well as a range of ritualistic behaviour. Of course there are other reasons why such forms are chosen. But the short-term apparent suppression of emotion is an important reason why hierarchy can seem so effective at first sight. These methods fail in the end, though, and themselves precipitate further basic assumption activity. Emotionality is felt to be the enemy; or the demise of emotionality is cheerfully envisaged in the future; or dependency is established on the basis of complete (illusory) rationality. In short, these solutions to the problems caused by the emotionality of groups turn out to be a good deal more irrational than the effects of emotions were in the first place.

Rationality is certainly possible in individuals alone, although it will be divorced from the reality of groups (and hence from humanity). Emotions are essentially group phenomena, even when experienced alone. Useful rationality (as opposed to "intellectual masturbation") is a group phenomenon too, and therefore inescapably involves a fair measure of emotion.

d) How not to see (or dismiss) the basic assumptions

This article argues that emotional developments in groups can seriously affect what they do, and how they explain what they do. But two particular points must be borne in mind.

ANOTHER LEVEL

Firstly, explanations in terms of the basic assumptions are not simple alternatives to the familiar types of interpretation. Groups typically explain themselves (or are described by outsiders) in terms of conscious, rational, verbal processes. Reference will be made to the expressed aims of the group, its methods, and to the effects of the society and culture the group is part of, as well as to specific events or situations having some influence on the group. What is being suggested here is that there is an additional level of mental activity which is also very influential. So it might be that both levels lead to a particular outcome for a specific group in a unique situation (ie the outcome is overdetermined). What is more likely though, is that these different levels will have mutually interacted in complex ways throughout the group's history, so that neither can be pinned down as the sole cause of anything the group does. This means that the emotional states predominant in the group will have constantly conditioned its "rational" output and vice versa. The point is that these effects can take place relatively unconsciously, so that more care needs to be taken in drawing conclusions solely in terms of rational objectivity. The potential effects of emotionality have perhaps been overstressed here (maybe even exaggerated). This is because they have been almost universally ignored, or at best played down elsewhere.

PRO'S AND CON'S

Secondly, there is the question of how damaging the activity of basic assumptions is or need be. This is rather difficult to assess in general terms. Basic

assumption processes may constitute the emotional foundations of all group behaviour. If so they cannot simply be condemned without falling into the trap of bourgeois individualism (ie to make an ideal out of the fully autonomous and rational individual). That would be exchanging one set of delusions for another. Furthermore "solidarity" is a valued, admired and sought-after attribute for groups. We would presumably not want to undermine it or advocate that it be done without. Yet solidarity is one aspect of basic assumptions in practice. It is that intangible feeling of closeness and togetherness in shared endeavour that complements the loss of reality-sense and ability rationally to perceive and act on the environment. It is also often our most important sustenance.

Political groups have another problem, especially those who see the need for radical changes in society. Hope and optimism must be maintained to some extent, even when it is not really justified. If it were not, groups would soon run down in depression, desperation and defeat. But hope and optimism can easily turn into a faith in illusions of one kind or another, even when combined with some slight realistic awareness of the what the prospects are. When carried further it can become a totally naive and simplistic belief in how easy and imminent change is. This is probably one of the things Lenin meant when he described ultra-left politics as "infantile disorders". On the other hand it is equally true that an unrealistic but determined hope may be what is needed to tip the scales in particular actions (and especially in revolutionary periods). Evidence here concerns the way that such outcomes may be totally unpredicted and unexplainable by political groups at the time (although of course they pretty quickly find a way of pretending to understand), armed as they are with largely rational tools of analysis. Also, in small measures, hope and optimism are probably necessary in propaganda, even though it can then attract those looking for anything upon which to focus their own irrational hope.

A similar paradox applies to the hostile basic assumption. It is obvious how damaging (indeed disastrous) hating and aggressive behaviour can be in most situations. But given the power of the state and its institutions there will certainly be a place for implacable hostility and violence if our vision is to be achieved. To a lesser extent the same is true of resistance falling well short of having revolutionary possibilities. Not to accept this is to be content with posturing and play-acting, not to mention moralising smugness.

The question is how such behaviour can be used without the hostile assumption taking over and subverting the action. We do not have or want the hierarchical structures others use to channel or absorb such strong emotional energy. To avoid utopianism we must have some idea of the answers to these questions. Remember, the authoritarians have answers. The fact that their answers are wrong, and lead to worse domination than before, is beside the point. Given the choice between concrete solutions (correct or not) and wishful thinking, most people regretfully choose the former.

Emotion in action

a) Strong emotions

In what follows, the emotional states and changes of political groups and movements are given a status and priority that may seem exaggerated to many people. There is a purpose to this. We so routinely interpret politics in terms of its rationalisations that we can completely forget that it is humans and human behaviour that are involved. What happens is that we see people in politics as ciphers, as mere vehicles for ideological alternatives. Fair enough in theory (bad theory). But when analysing people in action, it does not work. To be fair, many people realise this. But there still seems to be a determined resistance to applying that realisation in

practice. So when describing their own experience, the rationalised pretense takes over as before. Partly because people feel uncomfortable with the notion of themselves as largely irrational, they lack a language or model which adequately fits their experience.

In fact the most valid way to apply these ideas is in groups you are part of. Only then are you sufficiently acquainted with the group to be at all confident in making these difficult interpretations. Of course there is an immediate paradox here. The more involved with a group you are, the more influenced by its basic assumptions activity you will be. It may be useful to start by observing groups more peripheral to you - that is groups you have a lot of contact with but do not see yourself as part of. This can give experience in perceiving these processes, and organising those perceptions coherently.

This article is an introduction to the subject. I'm not going to risk making it even less interesting by concentrating on personal experiences in groups and situations unfamiliar to readers (even though that would allow more detailed and specific analysis). Instead the intention here is to show how these concerns can help to illuminate past and present happenings and struggles in political life. Very often all that gets described is how much of a "heroic struggle" people engaged in. Conversely, some of the same people are dismissed in contemptuous terms for their various human failings. Proper attention to emotional developments may help to change the picture from a black and white caricature to a more real mixture of shades of grey. This is not to blur the lines of opposition. Very often there may be compelling reasons to view people and groups purely as agents of the class enemy, capital or state, or as the agents of their own private interests. But dehumanising people in this way is an insidious process. It is also the mainstay of capitalist exploitation and bureaucratic rationalisation. It is a dead end.

The examples discussed very sketchily here are mostly of large scale movements that consist of networks of groups and individuals. This is obviously a far more complicated situation than the small group viewed in isolation. But it does highlight an important aspect of small group activity. Both the small group itself and the individuals comprising it make up larger groups and ultimately societies. Each small group may behave primarily as one element among many, or as just a part of a larger whole. This won't make as much difference as might be imagined to its emotional functioning. But it will have some bearing on how automatically a small group responds to more large scale emotional changes. A small group behaving more autonomously will tend to resist such changes more. Mass populist movements organising around a single issue, on the other hand, are almost always overcome by basic assumption mentalities fairly early in their histories (even if this can't explain their origins). This is usually reflected in small groups which sway in the winds from mass level. Small groups with their own local workgroup history can be better able to genuinely participate and help create wider associations and federations. Here, perhaps, basic assumption activity may be more limited to the local level, with greater possibilities for dealing with it appropriately.

I claim no special knowledge of the examples which allows me to justify the rather strong assertions made. Any apparent overconfidence is intended to give the rather odd-sounding kinds of interpretations their fullest head, perhaps even giving them enough rope to be hung by. My intention is that each be read as one possible interpretation among many - not as an alternative to any other interpretation, but as a level that can be added to others to give a more satisfactory and complete picture.

b) Liberal democracy

Political parties in liberal democracies are simple examples of dependent groups. Their leaderships, or the parties themselves, are alternately seen as strong and capable, and then as vulnerable and needing support and tending. This oscillation

is even built into the parliamentary system, justified with the platitudes and clichés of the "philosophy" of democracy. These have a robust ability to mask the fact of elective dictatorship and lack of choice. Apologists for liberalism point to the polling figures and argue that their politics is based on consensus. Ordinary folk have fewer illusions, but cannot easily conceive of alternatives in the face of the real power mistaken to "belong" to politicians. Large-scale dependency systems need groups (communities) to feel impotent in controlling their own lives, so that the dependent leadership is felt to be necessary. In times of crisis the emotional leadership itself requires protection, covering itself with notions like "the nation" or "our way of life".

The verbalised, communicated and communicable description of political "reality" has to become displaced from material and economic reality for the system to perpetuate itself without major recurring upheaval. In the process of this displacement any authenticity is sacrificed, heralding the deterioration of public life bemoaned by conservative moralists. Whichever is in power, all the conventional political parties collaborate in maintaining the illusion, leaving precious little in the way of language with which to oppose or resist the imperatives of capitalist development. An excellent example of this is exposed in the work of Noam Chomsky on United States foreign policy (but his voice is barely heard in America). The terms of political debate, selective as they are, are presented in the mainstream media as the total range of possible positions that "reasonable" people could take. What Chomsky misses are the psychological underpinnings of this in the mass-psychological "need" for dependency in a dependent-group culture (even if it is a need engineered out of a cynical manipulation of human emotion). His analysis of the role of the intelligentsia as "permitted dissidence" is astute, but does not explain why it persists so successfully, even when people "know" full well, intellectually, how immoral and pathetic their leaders are. Even on this level the whole basis of capitalism itself escapes examination.

In terms of power and control liberal democracy is a masterpiece of subtle domination compared to the shoddy ad hoc authoritarianism of state communism. Under liberalism people participate in their own domination, collaborating without realising that that is what they are doing. Under communism people can see more clearly the nature of the coercion that compels them. The "self-domination" of liberalism is not however the same as that in fascism. In the latter society shifts unstably among the basic assumptions, in the former society is firmly nailed down to a cross of dependency. Liberalism is still a chaos of contradiction. But it is in such a mire of inauthentic and fantastic experience that dependency, false though it is, often seems to be all that holds society together. People find themselves having to believe, against some of their better judgments, that the politicians or parties know what they are doing, that the country is being "run" properly. Since "the country" is in fact the "people", this is a simple statement of dependency.

c) Structural schismatics

Marxist-leninist sects display what happens when basic assumptions activity becomes a major factor in determining group structure. Obviously their main form is schismatic. Switches of assumptions in subgroups have a subsequent effect in the timing of splits and the nature of resulting fragments. The hierarchical structure of these groups means that emotional fluctuations in a quite small group at the apex have an inordinate effect overall. As is well-known, personal idiosyncracies and conflicts largely determine the group's development. Typically a group goes through (or its precursors do) of messianic populism and absorption. Only the most moribund of groups fail to continue in this vein for recruitment purposes. Very quickly the party elite establish themselves as the dependent leadership. However they are personally so grandiose and paranoid that they convey an image of omnipotence to those at the base. But a dependent group cannot be stable and at all

effective as a workgroup if it perceives the leadership to be so all-knowing and all-powerful in the group. This is because it involves seeing themselves as impotent, without the periodic dependence of the leader on the group as in normal dependency. The alternative to further schism must rely on rivalry and the religious incantation of marxist formulae, as well as the more mundane micro-politics of groups with rigid hierarchies. This combination of emotional elements explains, on one level, the ease with which leninist groups become so detached from any reality, and from their stated aims and objectives.

d) CNT: outline of a case study

During its resurgence in the 1970's the spanish anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT-AIT recruited tens of thousands of workers in a fairly short space of time. Whatever the emotional state of the embryonic CNT there was no way any kind of emotional continuity could be maintained during this period. For many of the recruited, the CNT will have been symbolic of all of the good to have preceded Franco. It will have been strongly idealised. In its social and political context such idealisation is more likely than usual to lead to dependent and messianic basic assumptions. In the event both developed prominently in the CNT.

The militants and anarchists who planned the rebirth of the CNT were probably influenced by messianic assumptions of their own to start with, as a counterpart to the stagnant dependency rampant during the fascist era. These assumptions enabled them to be blind to the evidence showing the dangers to organisations of sudden explosive growth, compared, for example, to the CNT the first time around which grew slowly and painfully from traditions established in the 1860's. But although they may have been surprised by its rate of growth, the stewards of its rebuilding must have overlooked the trouble they were going to have maintaining the anarchist orientation of the CNT.

The new people coming in may have had sympathy for some version of anarchism. Many described themselves, and believed themselves to be anarcho-syndicalist. But they had no recent history of personal experience, practice and struggle in anarchist organisations. This facilitated the later adventures with the Works Committees which proved so damaging.

In the light of the rapid absorption, the anarcho-syndicalist principles of the CNT began to degenerate into a dependent leadership of the group-bible type. Given the turbulent history of the CNT this emotional leadership was necessarily selective, determined partly by the particular experiences and idiosyncracies of leading militants. Firstly in some cases there was the ignoble memory of collaboration with the republican government in the 1930's. In the Franco era, despite some notable efforts, the only way to sustain beliefs such as anarchism was in a covert, passive-dependent, virtually silent way. After all, it was more and more impossible to do anything about them. Then too there were memories of errors and mistaken paths taken in exile. All of this will have helped to facilitate the emotional developments which were to lead rather easily to a position of dependence on those beliefs.

THE TURN TO ASSUMPTIONS

The standard of political consciousness of the recruited masses in the 1970's was very varied. As mentioned, many had an idealised image of the CNT as past and future saviour. Perceiving this morass of messianic fantasy the committed anarcho-syndicalists were in the rather frightening position of realising that if they didn't do something, the principles they wanted to further were in danger of becoming made hazy, diluted and ultimately neutralised. Understandably perhaps, their response (probably unconsciously) was to strengthen those principles, turning them into a more rigid set of axioms rather than as guides to action. The switch to the dependent basic assumption had got underway in this subgroup.

This strengthening meant that despite the aspirations and development of the membership, a minority took it upon themselves to engender in the rest a faith, trust or belief in principles that otherwise might have been known to require a long gestation in practice to become meaningful and concrete. What else the revolutionary syndicalists could have done is open to question, other than to resign themselves to a long and arduous process of redevelopment as opposed to rebirth. After Franco the temptation to do what they did must have been very strong, especially in the light of their own messianic tendencies.

What of the idealisation of the CNT? The irrational euphoria at post-Franco possibilities and the crusading zeal of the new CNT-ers bubbled away for a while. Other older militants came to share this emotional attitude, particularly some who had stayed in the vertical unions during fascism. So although the dependent subgroup recruited many members, so did the messianic one.

With some sections of the CNT developing towards dependence on its principles, some individuals and groups were primarily concerned to protect and sustain that dependent leadership whenever it appeared to be threatened. But at the same time others were operating under messianic assumptions, although some of their behaviour looked similar to maintaining and furthering principles. They wanted to grow, to spread to the whole of Spain, to stride across new frontiers, whether or not such moves had been adequately prepared. Perceived as an absolute necessity this notion will have occupied people's minds to the virtual exclusion of all other concerns. To these people the idea of paying attention to the classic anarcho-syndicalist principles of building and consolidating will doubtless have sounded conservative, unimaginative and stifling, if not downright reactionary. Because these processes were so deeply rooted emotionally, people with the contrasting attitudes had a great deal of difficulty listening to, or even comprehending, each other. By the time their differences of emphasis had become graphically obvious the groundwork for the schismatic consequences was well-established.

ON T' COMMITTEE

The crunch came over the issue of the Works Committees. These were initiated by the socialist government in order to contain and hamstring workers' dissent and effective union activity. The messianic assumptions had by now set the tone for development in the pro-committee CNT. A measure of this is that it didn't seem to occur to them that it was not just a tactical decision, and that in fact it could be a disaster for any kind of syndicalism to work in the committees. After all there is plenty of evidence that this is so, for example in West Germany or even in the hierarchical fascist-bureaucratic unions of the Franco time. Indeed the pro-committee CNT were so confident in their roles of prophets and saviours of the CNT that they intended to work within the committees so as to destroy them, dismantling them from within. Where have we heard that before? If they felt themselves to be invulnerable in this respect that would be another mark of the messianic assumptions. More recently an unease has begun to surface about the rationale of working in the Works Committees. But in the light of the hard decisions made by the pro-committee groups, and the trouble caused since those decisions, it would be very difficult for this unease to culminate in a U-turn over the whole issue.

It is important to remember that the basic assumptions interact with all other areas of thought and behaviour (as do "single" emotions). The overtly messianic attitudes in the resurgence of the CNT will have been transformed rapidly into strings of rationalisations. These will be clung to tenaciously thereafter, leaving people with well-worked out arguments to wield against unbelievers. These arguments will nevertheless contain crucial gaps or blind spots, which betray the emotional origins of the rationalisations themselves.

SPLITS GALORE

Several waves of splits and expulsions have occurred from 1980 onwards in the CNT. Each concerned minorities who wanted to experiment with Works Committees. The

largest split was that of 1983 after the 6th Congress of the CNT-AIT in Barcelona. A resolution condemning the Committees but allowing individual unions to experiment with them if they felt they must was passed by a small majority. But the aggressive behaviour of the most vehement anti-committee delegates caused the Congress to retract the resolution and defer the issue to a special (Monographic) Congress. This was said to be due to wanting to avoid playing into the hands of the bourgeois media, who were waiting like vultures to pounce on discord in the CNT.

After the treatment the compromise resolution received, many of the pro-committee unions did not send delegates to the special Congress. This resolved with a large majority to condemn the Committees utterly, and to expel any unions that went ahead and stood for election to them. The pro-committee faction had not got their way. They felt that they had been shamelessly manipulated and that anarchist principles had been betrayed in order to safeguard "purity" in the CNT. But pro-committee CNT members made up over half of the membership of CNT before 1980 (although apparently less than half of the "activists") Was it really just CNT-AIT fanatics manipulating Congress? Was it also possible that the decision to split had already been made, albeit emotionally and perhaps unconsciously? If so the timing of the split just needed an opportunity for easy rationalisation. The events of the 6th Congress may have represented such an opportunity.

Those leaving the CNT-AIT mostly took the name CNT with them (CNT-V, CNT-PC, CNT-O, CNT-U etc.). Anarcho-syndicalism had been kept in name, but what was promulgated was at best a variety of syndicalism. How would we describe anarchists who stood for local election in the face of what they saw as declining numbers and influence, who furthermore retained the names of the anarchist organisations they had left? We probably wouldn't be complimentary. Works Committees may be composed only of workers, but they still represent a situation where the state determines the union's structure.

The behaviour of some in CNT-AIT was reprehensible. Although it had led to a vigorous anarcho-syndicalist face, it had meant leaving aside for a time the notion that means must be commensurate with ends, in the manipulation and intimidation used. But also nothing can justify the splitting mentality of the pro-committee groups. If they were serious anarcho-syndicalists (and even more to the point if they were committed CNT members) they should have stayed in and fought their case.

If the classic CNT form of organisation was so vulnerable to being taken over by authoritarian and fanatical elites (as the pro-committee CNT claimed had happened), why did the splitters keep identical structures in their rival organisations?

Unfortunately they were obsessed with the vision of themselves as the descendants of the old CNT, most fitted to saving the CNT and the workers. This messianic attitude shows itself more clearly with the first splits, for example when those who left called themselves the CNT-V. They were in a clear minority but still took the name CNT with them. Grandiosity could lead them to equate completely the image and future of the CNT with their own beliefs and intentions, and it wouldn't have mattered how many disagreed with them. They dismissed others with pretensions to that role in the most convenient terms that could be found.

This tendency to split whenever you don't feel entirely happy with others (either personally or over particular tactics) will usually be very destructive. It makes the idea of direct democracy and consensus rather pointless if people will only go on taking part if they get their way. What would the splitters do in an anarchist society - go off and form a separate universe? The ex-CNT groups argued that they could not function on a day-to-day level as a syndicalist union without splitting from those seen as dogmatic and intransigent. Even if we accept that they genuinely felt that, we must still ask how they will function as a syndicalist union if they are going to co-operate with each new tool dreamt up by the state to ruin effective unionism.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

In the last three years the CNT-AIT seems not to be declining in numbers any further. Its gross emotional state seems to vary greatly, oscillating mainly between dependence and hostility. As always its only real hope lies with the activity at the base, in rank and file industrial struggle. Diversions, such as the money and property confiscated by Franco will get no-one anywhere fast. Of course it would be nice for them to have the money ... but then it would be nice for me to win the pools. I'm not going to lose sleep over the possibility. On the other hand it could be a relatively harmless outlet for messianic assumptions, to imagine what wonderful things could be done with the money. But if the CNT-AIT concentrates all of its efforts on initiating court cases it will probably make rather little impression on workers needing protection from the socialist state.

Younger militants may not be so backward looking and bitter as some of the remnants of the CNT-in-exile. The latter could be a continuing source of inspiration and could contribute much, providing that they don't concentrate on replaying old enmities and infecting others with them. This shows the necessity of accepting, analysing and learning from past mistakes, which is one of the things LOS is urging. Otherwise you can get stuck in a "repetition-compulsion".

In Britain we may be getting a rather distorted picture of what is going on at the base. Individuals in the CNT-AIT and the ex-CNT's may know each other as united in anarcho-syndicalism. Remember, many of the people whose unions left or were expelled from the CNT-AIT were strongly opposed to the Works Committees themselves, even though they stayed with their groups. We can mistake some of the posturing on both sides for real attitudes and behaviour from top to bottom. Indeed, if it had not been for one person in England making an effort to discover and publicise the events we might be left with a view of this piece of history that would just assert how the splitters were merely CIA dupes, catholic-fascist or maoist entryists or some other such nonsense. This must indicate some deep-seated and irrational tendencies in ourselves, that we could have been content with such a ridiculous black-and-white travesty. We could always cover it up by pleading ignorance.

The ex-CNT factions are now grouped mainly into the CNT-U (U for unification!). They have tended to move between dependent and messianic assumptions. The dependency is on individuals and elites rather than on principles represented by "leading militants" as in the CNT-AIT. As people in the CNT-U learn what a disaster the Works Committees can be, the remnants of the messianic vision will become increasingly tattered. It had come to be represented by the idea of agitation on Works Committees as the vehicle of the deliverance of CNT and workers. Instead, bureaucratic elites are tending to form from CNT-U members on committees that are estranged from the rank and file. Groups of committee members can then become dependent leaderships unless the messianic hope can be recreated. But the contradictions inherent in the CNT-U make this unlikely, in my view.

Nevertheless, in some areas the CNT-U is the only functioning mass syndicalist union, as the CNT-AIT defends its ideology at the expense of organising workers, and becomes a propaganda group by its own design. Another widespread tendency is for autonomous unions to develop industrially, such as the Co-ordinadora of the dockers, or among peasant unionists. These wish, among other things, to distance themselves from both CNT's.

e) CND and other liberal messianic movements

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, in its current incarnation in Britain, is a good example of a movement heavily influenced by messianic assumptions. In whichever ways CND members choose to rationalise their movement, the predominant emotional tone has been one of generalised and irrational hopefulness and expectation. The decline of movements like this co-incides with the ebbing of such moods,

when the vision can no longer be sustained. It should be emphasised yet again that I am talking about the emotional states of CND-ers, rather than the ideology or rationalisations per se.

CND tend to have a very naive, almost childlike faith in the ability of their organisation to force the state to disarm. This is reflected in their choice of actions, which remain largely symbolic. The propaganda value of NVDA (non-violent direct action) is debatable, but, for example, the women at Greenham Common really believed that they were going to stop the installation of cruise missiles. During the period when CND's messianic assumptions were most marked, all of their usual characteristics were present in extreme forms. Members engaged in frenetic activity borne along on the conviction that they were going to save the world.

As in the 1960's, CND activists get "burnt out" and disillusioned with the messiah, and a turn to dependency becomes more and more widespread. Now, as then, a popular expression of the switch of assumptions is shown as individuals come to believe that the Labour Party will do away with Britain's nuclear weapons. The Labour Party or some other dependent leadership take the place of the messianic vision of a wonderful world without nukes as the emotional focus for members. This contrasts with environmentalist groups, who are able to generate their own dependent leaderships from amongst their own ranks.

It is a commonplace that CND has no theory of social or political change. They appear to want to believe that once a majority of the population oppose nuclear weapons in principle, then the appropriate changes can be forced. It is a mark of just how entrenched the messianic assumptions are that they can thus ignore the massive historical evidence against that belief.

Disarmers identify their cause (and themselves) with saving the species, or all species, or the planet. Arguments along these lines are quintessentially messianic. In pure form they become almost indistinguishable from evangelical christianity, armageddon and all. It is not uncommon for middle class organisations to do this, being a very convenient way of overlooking conflict or private class interests in the past, present or future.

For a messianic assumption to be sustained, all other considerations which don't fit it must be ignored. From reading CND propaganda one could sometimes be forgiven for thinking that no other area of struggle matters, that everything else pales into insignificance compared to the need to disarm. This is undoubtedly one of the main reasons why working class people are so under-represented in CND, and why CND hasn't the vaguest hint of any class analysis. Another of the astonishing things about CND is the blind eye it turns on weapons which are not nuclear, and to war and the military in general. It can be argued that nuclear weapons are so much worse than others that it is valid to concentrate on them. Equally it can be said that CND divert attention from the proliferating biological and chemical weapons-complexes, and from the normal activity and roles of the military across the world. There seems to be an inexorable process at work which turns opposition to nuclear weapons into an exclusive alternative to opposition to everything else.

What about the state of the world after disarmament? States would possess all of the knowledge of nuclear weapons that they do now. They will probably use much enhanced security systems even than exist now, enabling them to build nukes again whenever they chose. They might no longer be subject to any of the marginal public constraints that still just about exist. Plus of course all of the other arms of the apocalypse would be in correspondingly more advanced stages. For this CND want us to agitate against nuclear arms?

GREENS ETC

Environmentalist groups exhibit similar messianic behaviour to CND. However the content and aims are much more diffuse and generalised. In some ways this is more satisfactory from the point of view of the messianic assumptions. They do not now

rely on attention to so specific an aspect of the real world. With CND there is always the chance that people will realise how daft it is to organise around so limited an issue. One effect of the more diffuse nature of the greens is that dependent leaderships can arise from within their own ranks, as in West Germany. Dependence on these leaderships can sustain members when the zealous faith in the vision wears thin.

Messianic movements must have some way of tolerating disagreement and lack of interest on the part of those they claim to be the saviours of. The working class may accept the main arguments behind the movements (who doesn't) but have no truck at all with the movements themselves (partly they are perceived as representing alien class interests). One way of dealing with this is to take on the arrogance and smugness all middle classes are noted for. That way objections are beneath them. CND and the Greens avoid the problem by concentrating on saving all of humanity or the planet itself. These objects of their efforts are conveniently unable to answer back and disown their benefactors. Animal libbers have a similar solution. They act on behalf of "dumb" animals. All the animals can do to protest at this is to die at the claws of the carnivorous predators (mink) released into their local ecology at several million times the normal population density. It probably never occurs to the members of these messianic groups that what they do might conceivably be directly detrimental to the interests of those they want to save.

It has been objected that the "Greens" aren't a single movement at all, but a range of all sorts of diverse kinds of groups. Of course there is a lot of truth in this, but it is less relevant when focussing on the emotional reactions and forces active among environmentalists. From this point of view it does look like much more of a coherent movement.

FASCISM

Messianic fascism has fewer of the sexualised overtones of the liberal movements. It shows more starkly the infantile, psychotic character of the messianic assumption, with grandiose and sadistic sources of pleasure. Unlike the liberal movements fascism is well-known for its tendency swiftly to degenerate into outright hostility and violence. This is because the messianic vision is associated with destroying the devil rather than delivering the god. The devil inevitably comes to mean particular people rather than remaining just an ideal. Providing that those people are not too obviously not the devil-incarnate, it will be impossible to prevent members from physically attacking them. A glance at the mystical beliefs of the nazis and other fascists substantiates this contention well enough.

OTHER FACTORS

When they become less marginal in conventional political terms, messianic groups tend to turn to dependency. Often though certain organs or subgroups retain the messianic assumption, perhaps at an even greater intensity than before. Intellectual elites and recruiting subgroups develop the messianic vision away from the lives of the dependent membership, thus safeguarding the leadership from threats from within the group, and relieving the leadership of the onerous duty of having to control the messianic behaviour.

With all of these messianic movements a variant on the theme may be found. The vision may be identified with some lost paradise in the past, before "original sin". This has the particular advantage that historical evidence can be distorted to flesh out the messiah without the slightest chance of turning it into a dependent leader. For example, Strasserite fascists idealise a feudal past, some environmentalists appeal to a pre-industrial ecology, and some feminists derive inspiration from a mythical, pre-historical matriarchy. The CND is an exception here - it could hardly get away with extolling the virtues of the pre-nuclear world.

f) British Anarchism

EMOTION & PREJUDICE

I hope by now that it is clear that many of the foregoing interpretations do apply to groups in the anarchist "movement" in this country. At present we are enjoying something of a resurgence in numbers, but so far there is little sign that the lessons of even recent attempts to organise are being learned, because we can see the signs and seeds of failure being implanted amongst all of the optimism.

However, many people are proposing national anarchist federations of one kind or another, some people have acted on these proposals in Class War and the Anarchist-Communist Federation. Anarcho-syndicalists can point to a fairly well-established organisation, the DAM-IWA, which despite its potential has already suffered the effects of strong emotional forces and prejudices sweeping through it, all explained away as usual on rational political grounds. There is much awareness of the shortcomings of large-scale groups, but a persistent failure to go beyond the surface clichés. For example, mandated delegates and instant recall would universally be claimed to be central to the structure of organisations, but little evidence that these mechanisms are actually used in any meaningful sense. How such assembly-oriented ideas can be adapted to a situation where branches are tiny and relatively inactive receives no attention.

We have individuals who spend large amounts of time and energy criticising others on individual, personal, small-group and political grounds (all masquerading as political grounds only), but who then themselves drop out of the group when on the receiving end of criticism. Or in an article recently in a local anarchist paper it is blithely stated that any disagreement or conflict, however minor, is good grounds for splits. Or, those who favour one unaccountable journal over another indulge in misinformation tactics about each other that are then reciprocated. This even extends as far as printing distorted information about particular stories or individuals which seem to derive mainly from people's paranoid fantasies but which are used to fuel the antagonism. On a larger scale we have local branches of organisations which progressively distance themselves from everyone else and eventually cause great ructions. But throughout the process all anyone can do is mouth the familiar anarchist structures which have so little to do with what is actually happening - and have no bearing on the problems and nothing to offer in the way of solutions. Sometimes we seem to live in cloud-cuckoo land. The least that can be said that personal conflict and high emotion exert a much wider effect, at all levels of our work, and that we ignore this at our peril.

I prefer to leave this for readers' own reflections on their own experiences, rather than trying to dissect the sorry state of anarchism in Britain today. Most people could probably come up with very many other examples of the mental states of many anarchists influencing the action of others, and having disastrous effects in terms of our "image" to outsiders who might otherwise have considered getting involved. Surely, taken together, these facts indicate that there is much more going on than simple ideological differences that could be ironed out rationally at some point. Is it not likely that the kinds of emotional processes outlined in this article could be responsible for much of this state of affairs?

WHERE NEXT?

The only near-consensus I've detected in all the talk is that whatever else it might be, a national federation of anarchists would have to be organised around class issues. But some calling themselves class-conscious anarchists or anarcho-syndicalists seem to prefer to liberate animals or stop cities, even when you would think that their presence demonstrations, marches, pickets and other actions more directly and straightforwardly relevant to working people would be more appropriate. Naturally people should be part of whatever movements they felt

necessary. But often people want to insist that all of their personal peculiarities have to be fundamental to anything they get involved in. People confuse their own moral stances with anarchism, which is surely about strategies to change society. We may or may not envisage that in an anarchist society anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-cruelty to animals, anti-environmental ruination and all of the other things would become the norm. But strategy to change society has to appeal to more than a change in laws or public opinion, and has to involve more than rebellious moralising and the counter-cultural pose.

One thing that can be done is to think carefully about what a national organisation is for, what it can and would do, as opposed to what it might be nice for it to do. This is better than having the hazy conviction that it must be necessary and then rushing ahead issuing membership cards. From this angle it is clear that it should involve no grandiose claims and intentions, which would only detract from the slow process of building active local groups. To start with a major role is providing co-ordination of information relating to present struggles and with educative functions. But it is questionable whether or not that would be enough to keep it going and stop it from glorifying itself or breaking down as previous efforts mostly have done.

Another possibility is that there might be a place for a loose federation of class-conscious anarchist groups, linked even more loosely to the DAM. Something along the lines of the old CNT-FAI situation in Spain, but without the clandestine, secretive structure of the FAI. Even if something like this were to be remotely desirable, it would certainly require major changes in attitudes. For a start everyone would have to be a damned sight less ambitious about how meaningful it would all instantly be. Also the DAM itself would need to be a little less hostile and defensive in its reactions, instead of expelling and driving away militants and assuming that any discussion of DAM is necessarily hostile and malicious criticism. Thirdly, because the movement is so small and hence cannot do much, there has been a tendency to sneer at talk. Talk and what passes for theory may be at most mildly interesting, so it doesn't justify the kinds of hysterical attacks it gets from some quarters when the interest isn't shared. With tiny groups action can be difficult and unrewarding, whereas discussion, and especially criticism is absurdly easy. It can be emotionally satisfying to stick the knife in about someone else's pathetic talk, when one is really trying to alleviate the anxiety and frustration felt at one's own lack of effectiveness in action.

CONCLUSION

Maybe we all need to grow up a bit, to cultivate a little more humility (this applies to some older as well as to some younger comrades). If that sounds like moralising - look around you - at how infantile and childish behaviour messes up anything and everything it infects. In spite of all of our fine words, and undoubtedly superior basic theories, we as humans can be just as silly, blundering and bloody-minded as anyone else. And we are like that a lot of the time. We do not become immune from all of the basic human frailties by choosing the black and red.

Ritual Anarchy

Introduction

In this essay I will consider the way that we as subjective individuals necessarily fall prey to objective factors in our group and political environment. The point of this is not to sound a retrogressive note of pessimism - that autonomy is an impossibility - but to recognize our limits and thereby attempt to deal with them. By sensitizing ourselves to these constraints, hopefully, we will become a little critical of the monopolistic rationality we habitually lay claim to.

The format of this essay is as follows: First there will be a brief commentary on Jo Freeman's "Tyranny of Structurelessness". This will serve as prelude to a more general discussion of the relation between individual and (group) environment. In this section, the role of ritual will be considered. In particular, the pay-offs of ritual, and their grounding in certain historical conditions, will be examined in the context of general examples of the way that rituals permeate and subvert libertarian groups.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The main issue I will attempt to address concerns the claims to an unalloyed rationality that many political groups, including anarchistic ones, express. These often take the form of an assumption that the people involved in such groups are pure autonomous individuals. In contrast, I argue that people are also objects affected by an array of factors which includes the other members of the group. Primarily, I will focus on how mutual objectification (treating each other as objects) is orchestrated as ritual within libertarian groups and consider the pay-offs such a process has for individuals, the group and anarchism.

A partial critique of the notion of the freely constituted and active group can be found in Jo Freeman's essay, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness". Freeman presents us with a contrast between the apparent structurelessness of some political groups, particularly feminist 'rap' groups, and their covert power content. She aims to show how this decoupling of ideology and practice hampers: (1). Equality and democracy within the group itself; (2). Practical action by that group; and (3). Practical action mounted on a wider (eg national) scale. In doing this, she constructs a part-theoretical, part-historical analysis of the degeneration of or potential degeneration of 'rap' or consciousness-raising (CR) groups. Her argument runs thus: In structureless groups there is a tendency for informal elites to be constituted; these elites are derived from friendship groups which are themselves constituted on the basis of similar characteristics (eg liking, hip-ness, having the time, etc). As such, they will often tend to be comprised of white middle-class women (for feminist groups). The informal friendship elites practice their power by essentially forming a bloc or body of opinion, based on liking and these outside links, which can be set up as the norm of the rap group. The point is that such a sub-group comes impose a structure on the group by monopolizing skills, authority, right-on-ness, etc: that is, it wields power. Historically, other sub-groups have also come to operate in structureless groups, especially those based on membership of another

political group outside the rap group (eg left parties): this would be equivalent to an informal 'entryism'. According to Freeman, what happens under such circumstances is a struggle for power within the rap group between friendship and political sub-groupings. Because of these various underground antagonisms, practical political action is undermined. Whereas in the original rap group, likeability could serve as a viable criterion of someone's competence, in the the practical group this comes to hinder effective political action.

Here we might detect a contradiction in Freeman's argument: the friendship sub-groups, themselves presumably structureless, have made an effective political move, namely, the domination of the larger rap group. However, we can salvage Freeman's argument if we consider friendship as actually structured: positions within the group are developed and filled through trial and error amongst friends. More relevant is the point that, while Freeman recognizes that friendship affects the importance that one attaches to someone's statements (ie you agree with someone because you like them), she neglects the fact that what one says will elicit an emotional response (eg like/dislike) which might lead to further alliances within the rap group. For example, research into the workings of small task-oriented groups has shown that someone who readily comes up with solutions to practical problems (ie someone who is, or projects him/herself as, superior) is more disliked than other members of the group. What this amounts to is a closer alignment of the rational and the emotional, or the subjective and the objective, than Freeman allows for.

Freeman's emphasis on friendship allows her to draw a radical distinction between CR type groups and the more structured groups (which would incorporate things like: due process of delegation, maximum distribution of authority and diffusion of information, equal access to resources, appropriate accountability of delegates, allocation according to abilities allied to an apprenticeship programme). While the former cater for a newfound awareness of issues, the latter attempt to do something about them. Put another way, CR groups entail internally oriented practice aimed at self-change; politics groups aim at an externally oriented practice. However, CR groups do not simply increase awareness, they change consciousness (eg in the ways that one considers oneself) - such changes will be severely limited by wider prevailing social conditions. Conversely, entering into new formally structured organizations of the sort outlined above, will have a CR effect (ie consciousness shifts: what one is capable of doing subtly alters). The apparently covert processes of influence and alliance that occur in CR groups also present in structured groups. To assume that the organizational set-up precludes these, as opposed to channelling, orchestrating or manipulating them, is ideological in the classical sense of advertising a solution for a problem which is objectively historically insoluble.

SOME DISTINCTIONS

The mutual influence of individuals can be studied from a variety of vantage points. "Non-Rational Politics" examines it from the perspective of the emotional content of such interactions. While I too will address some of the psychological aspects, my main effort will be directed at their philosophical and social underpinnings.

The relation between influence and autonomy can be re-read in terms of the concept of Praxis. In brief, Praxis refers to the close interaction of theory

and practice, or consciousness and action. What we do affects the way we think, and what we think affects the things we do. However, there is an historical dimension at work; we do things before we think about them. For each one of us, there is a set of activities and ideas prior to our existence which we absorb as the natural order of things. Thus, it is natural to work, to work in a certain way, to accept wages, etc. What 'natural' means in this context is that the thing that is 'natural' is not open to reflection, it is part and parcel of our practical-psychological make-up. Where we do begin to reflect on these practices, they are no longer natural (or objective); we render them historically conditioned. With that we open up the possibility of change. However, our perception of that change is itself historically conditioned. We cannot escape the grip of history; such a transcendentalism would be ideological.

Praxis can be divided into two components: practical and discursive consciousnesses. Practical consciousness refers to what we do; discursive to what we say and think. While the practical is involved in the automatic types of behaviour we engage in, it is not necessarily directly accessible to the discursive. For example, it is very difficult to describe how to do certain things such as ride a bicycle. Moreover, it is impossible to learn how to ride a bicycle simply by discussing it. What is needed is 'hands-on' experience. Similarly, with some practices the acknowledgement and criticism of them by discursive consciousness will have little practical effect (eg habit, phobia, depression). In the social domain, the same division applies, though with complications given that a large part of social interaction involves language. Nevertheless, in communication the use of posture, clothing, etc as signals primarily entails practical consciousness; it is not automatically open to discursive consciousness. Similarly the way we sometimes treat others, eg the macho objectification of women, is a practical process that men discourse on only with considerable effort (and even then, this is often merely rhetorical - it does not actually feed into the practice of those men).

The point is that the division between practical and discursive types of consciousness hints at a space in between. What we do and what we say we do (the motives, intentions, aims, etc with which we package our actions) do not necessarily correlate. There is some debate as to the degree to which this disjunction can be overcome. Some authors suggest that a 'negotiable accuracy' can be attained (ie with enough sympathetic discussion with the individual, you can get to the root of his/her behaviour - ie access the real motives, intentions, etc underlying the relevant actions). Others suggest that the individual does not always accurately (discursively) know why s/he did what s/he did. The explanations, etc that s/he furnishes might just be rationalizations. In other words, the gap between discourse and practice might be filled by ideology and mystification. Relating this to the above discussion of CR and structured groups, we can suggest that the structures of the latter groups might end up being little more than ideological, discursive glosses on the actual practices going on within that group.

The division between discursive and practical consciousness can be, somewhat messily, mapped onto the distinction between subject and object. Crudely, the subject is the individual conceived as an autonomous, self-determining, conscious being. The object, by comparison, is a thing whose behaviour is caused by influences, both internal and external, over which it has no 'conscious' control. These are the dual faces of being human: we are both subjects with wills and objects with features. On the whole, in social interaction we treat both ourselves and each other as subjects. Nevertheless, and necessarily, there is an objective component. As regard their relation to ideology, the discursive

can be aligned with the subjective (though mouthing of cliches, ideologies, etc suggests that the object also emerges in the discursive), and the practical with the objective (though, of course, we subjectively decide to learn to ride a bike, etc). In the same way that the discursive can play an ideological role, so too the subjective, by promoting itself as the sole source of action, can become ideological. Thus we find that the petty bourgeois individualist ideal of an absolute responsibility, while rejected by anarchists when applied to the oppressed (they behave as they do because they have been hoodwinked), is readily deployed in the slagging off of enemies both within and outside the anarchist movement. In other words, the assumption of a subjectivity behind every action can obscure the grounding of that action in a range of objective factors (eg group influence, transient political climate, long-term conditions of capitalism, patriarchy and authority) that apply as much to anarchists as to less "enlightened" folk. The problem, as we shall see, is that this glorification of the subject serves to obscure a profound objectification of both the self and others.

RITUAL

Ritual can be approached from a variety of angles. Functionally, it can be said to serve as communication, communicating to others anything from the performers' conception of the cosmos to their current psychological state and position in the hierarchy. On the same level, it can also be instrumental insofar as it is an attempt to, say, negotiate with or bring under control aspects of nature. Clearly, the communicative and instrumental functions are not mutually exclusive. For example, communicating a message will have instrumental effects on the perceiver. By the same token, we have the anarchist/radical view of ritual as essentially ideological, as constructed and presented by the ruling elites and their lackeys to mystify, subordinate and control the masses. However, as it has been pointed out, we can't assume that rituals necessarily do this. It would have to be positively shown that such rituals as the Coronation ceremony, etc do permeate and condition working class consciousness in such a way as to limit proletarian radicalism. In opposition to this, it can be argued that working class radicalism is usually thwarted by the material and legal impositions of capital and state). Further, some rituals also serve to resist mystification, to foster working class unity (eg the chants of 'here we go' are ritualistic and yet bring individuals together as a more or less coordinated mass that is 'consciously' directed at its given enemy).

Rituals also serve a function for the individual as well as the social system. I will return to this in more detail below, but for the present it will suffice to say that the use of ritual in everyday interaction (eg the stereotypical use of certain phrases such as 'have a nice day', the wearing of uniforms and the immersion in certain types of tightly demarcated roles) affords people a form of protection, a front behind which they can operate.

So far I have only dealt with the function of ritual; now I look at its structure. A ritual can be defined as comprising of a set of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances. These acts are stylized, repetitive, stereotypical and are performed at certain places and times. This basic definition really refers to the rituals that occur as a special event (eg Marriage, rain dances, etc). However, as already mentioned, ritual can also be extended into everyday life. Its characteristic features are:

(1). Patterned routines of behaviour. This can be expressed as a set of rules stating what act follows what.

(2). A system of signs to convey overt messages. Often this takes the form of postures, facial expression, etc, but also it can involve costumes and props.

(3). Sanctions. If you don't follow the procedures then you are punished; if you follow them properly, you are accepted.

(4). The connection between any given action (posture, movement, expression) or sign (costume, prop, etc) and their meaning (ie what they represent) is conventional. For example, both a crown and a leather jacket don't intrinsically represent monarchical power and youth rebellion respectively; these connections have had to be established through history, through convention.

We are now in a position to relate ritual to our discussion of subject/object and practical/discursive consciousness. The main claim I will make is that ritual pervades political groups, and that it is part of the individual members' practical consciousness. In other words, we practice ritual as objects, deciding neither upon the type of ritual nor its constitution. As such, we do not readily acknowledge either the presence of ritual or its pay-offs for us. In other words, ritual is not easily accessible to discursive consciousness; indeed, discourse, by invoking the autonomy of the individual tends to deflect attention from ritual. The subject postures; the object prevails.

What, then, are the pay-offs of ritual? What do individual members gain from the simultaneous practice and denial of ritualistic behaviour? What are the implications of this for politics as theorized and practised?

PAY-OFFS

To briefly summarize, ritual has been (roughly) equated with practical consciousness and the individual as object. What I will do in this section is suggest some of the gains that individuals derive from ritual and its tendency to objectify.

Ritual renders the individual passive. S/he knows exactly what is required of him/her. Even though s/he goes through the ritualistic motions, they are automatic. There is no choice in the action or sequence of actions. One is impelled to act as one does. (Obviously this is only a partial reading of ritual, but it is the component I will discuss.) This process of objectification, of constructing the self as an object is one of the things that is desired by the ritual performer. Self-objectification has peculiar pay-offs for the individual. (1) In allowing the individuals to be passive, ritual provides an opportunity for them to be lazy. They don't have to think very strenuously, to exert themselves. This might take the form of repeating what are simple revolutionary formulae. (2) Ritual can generate a sense of certainty, especially when it is collectively performed. That is, ritual allows little space for critical reflection and the uncertainty that comes with that. (3) A corollary of the above two points is that ritual offers security: a feeling that all that can be done is being done, that there is no alternative, that one is part of a cogent, orchestrated community. To reiterate, these processes are systematically denied by the performers.

The implication of this for political action is that, at the broadest level, intragroup behaviours and negotiations that are supposed to constitute a rational means of deciding upon political action, can actually be rituals by which the individual members reproduce their own and each others positioning

within the group. The lack of ideas that are generated by groups (though possibly anarchist groups are the most creative) can be viewed as a partial outcome of this ritualization. Similarly, factionalism and sectarianism can be reconceived as forms of ritual whereby subgroups ritualistically oppose one another, mouthing what are more or less stereotyped arguments (it's probably more accurate to call these insults) against each other while making no genuine attempt to listen. We'll return to this below.

For the moment, I will consider how it has been possible for the pay-offs outlined above to be 'pay-offs', ie to constitute 'valued' psychological conditions. In brief, the point is that people do not so much 'want' certainty, passivity, security (especially of the sort that leads to stultification and hierarchy) so much as tend towards it: it is an aspect of their objective constitution - they are constitutionally predisposed to it. Such a predisposition is not simply a natural tendency - though it can be argued that we are biologically oriented toward some form of stability. Rather, a substantial part derives from social conditions. In the following paragraphs I will look at three types of social condition that have influenced the tendency to ritually objectify. Each will be illustrated with a practical failing (or style) associated with political groups across the ideological spectrum. However, it should be noted at the outset that the equation between social condition and failing is not absolute.

Hierarchy

To treat others as inferior is to render them objects relative to oneself. According to Bookchin, power found its original expression in age-related hierarchies. Simultaneously, placing oneself in an absolute, non-negotiable position of (relative) power also renders the self an object insofar as one ascribes to the self traits which are permanent and superior - there is no admission of negotiated change. (Eg the elders were wise and therefore deserved power; in fact they were old and longed for security). Running parallel with this is the rhetoric of subjectivity. Those higher up the hierarchy also see themselves as more autonomous than those below. Thus the media almost invariably portray the elite white, middle-class male in terms of his personal characteristics (as a subject), but treat members of 'minority' groups (working class, women, black, etc) in terms of the characteristics of their group (eg the working-class woman is drunk because the working class are rowdy and women are irrational; by comparison, WASPman goes to the office from 9 to 5, etc, because it is his decision and desire to do so). In other words, minority groups are stereotyped and this is a means of objectifying them. A possible outcome of this is that members of the minority groups come to see themselves through the eyes of the elite; that is, they treat themselves as objects, they self-stereotype. (Certainly studies regarding the way women assess their success/failure on various types of task suggests this).

Given that many anarchists are located in a minority group, it can be argued that the uniformity and inflexibility of some of their arguments and actions reflects this process. But furthermore, given that many anarchists are also white, middle-class and male they will also have the rhetoric of autonomy at their disposal, a rhetoric that is over and above (or possibly under and below) that furnished by anarchism itself.

Within the overall social structure, politically marginalized groups will have an additional impetus to self-objectify. Political marginalization is often combatted by a determined effort to produce a coherent and absolute political line. This would suppress critical reflection and negotiation. This is common in

authoritarian groups of both fascist and communist ilk: but it can also be an, albeit less profound, element in anarchist groups. The result is a 'forensic ideology' in which complex events are perceived as having simple causes; above all, it is imperative to preserve the logical coherence of the explanatory framework. Thus for the fascists, anything remotely suspicious is interpreted as evidence for the Jewish-communist conspiracy; for the WRP, imminent economic crisis seems to encompass most events in the world; amongst certain anarchist groups, such as Class War, it all comes down to the rich bastards and the bastard state lackeys. It's not hard to imagine these processes of other, and self, objectification taking ritual form. The practical outcome of all this is a SIMPLIFICATION OF TACTICS. An enemy can be clearly defined and dealt with (final solution, sell more papers, kick a policeman in the goolies). Now, such a simplification is obviously conditioned by other factors, and its main 'advantages' are that it yields actions that are manageable, economic and, for the individuals involved, effective). But that's no real consolation for the poverty of vision that it consolidates.

Patriarchy

Objectification is something that is intimately intertwined with patriarchy. The psychological characteristics of macho masculinity can be roughly summarized as: A 'desire' to exert absolute control over the self and others, especially the ('otherness' of the) feminine, whether that be in the self, in women, or in nature. This 'desire' is expressed in the way that men objectify: (a). their own sexuality (ie they become phallogocentric: Willy is the sole repository of their eroticism); (b). women (fetishize particular parts of them; insist on their passivity); (c). exploit nature (ecology is ideally a process of negotiation, not unequal exchange). Some feminists have taken this even further suggesting that the ultimate masculine objectification is realized in death. Patriarchal science aims for certainty, predictability and control and yet these are most obviously present in death.

In the macho world of many political groups, anarchist ones not exempted, this tendency to objectify is mediated by ritual. The ritualistic heckling of/chanting at rallies is not simply a legitimate means of registering protest (given the minority status and relative powerlessness of such groups), but it is also an attempt to control the proceedings. It objectifies the target of the heckling in such a way that anything s/he says is interpreted as a manifestation of his/her essentially (objectively) evil characteristics. As I've already hinted, often this is perfectly justified. But sometimes it's not.

In this guise, machismo, can also generate self-objectification - especially through the medium of the group. Thus identification with a social group and the attribution of that group's defining characteristics to the self can lead to self-stereotyping. (eg I am a perfect/exemplary Tottenham supporter, Tory, anarchist). However, this self-objectification is in dialectical tension with masculinity's insistence on projecting itself as the subject par excellence. Hence it is the masculine subject that apprehends the feminine object. However, as we mentioned in the preceding section, this can be considered a more or less explicit means of instituting an hierarchy. The macho subject objectifies himself while advertising his autonomy as a means of putting the other down. Non-negotiable politics' view of themselves (in addition to their insufferable righteousness) as fundamentally more enlightened than everyone else can be seen as a moment in this dialectic; it is a partial cause of FACTIONALISM and sectarianism. The purity of the anarchist creed as practised by certain

individuals and groups, their utter dismissal of all those 'comrades' who dare dilute that purity, might reflect not a reasoned, negative evaluation of the 'other's' position/tactics/strategy/etc, but their own predisposition to objectify both self and other.

Capitalism

Finally, objectification has become contingent on certain dynamics and contradictions within capitalism. Because of the nature of the capitalist mode of production, especially the way in which it is managed, with the worker often having control neither over what is produced nor how it is produced, the product of labour appears to the worker to be stamped with an objective character. It is something outside the worker. In consequence, what is actually a social relation begins to appear as a relation between things. Relations between objects are no longer seen to be the result of human decision, but dependent on the objects' own intrinsic character which is beyond human reach. Powerlessness at the point of production means that people treat themselves and each other as objects. This process lies at the heart of much social interaction. We treat each other and ourselves as things; we see ourselves as static; we lose sight of our own social dynamism.

Anarchists are not immune from this 'infrastructural' condition. Likewise, they are not immune from the bourgeois creed of individualism. The sovereign individual is a necessary fiction: it is s/he who enters the market place hawking his/her labour power. Similarly, in the domain of consumption, it is the same autonomous subject who prefers Brand X to Brand Y. This autonomous subject needs to be continuously reconstructed: the role of the 'ideological state apparatuses' is just this. Thus the law summons the legal subject; school projects the achieving subject; religion divines the redeemable subject. Once again the contradiction between subject and object is reproduced in the functioning of capitalism.

The brutalization of the work place and its diffusion into all social domains is at one and the same time practised and denied by the ideology of the free subject. This dialectic surfaces in the workings of political groups and their use of ritual. The division of labour within groups can become ritualistic. The hush that surrounds the theoretician/tactician, the lay-out specialist who shows her/his latest pamphlet to the group, etc - these processes of assertion and deference entail both the objectification of qualities (eg s/he is good at doing that) and the subjectivization of decisions (eg S/he doesn't want to do that). Within all this ritual objectification, one comes to know one's place. There is an INSTITUTION of HIERARCHY.

SUMMARY/ CONCLUSION

In sum, in all groups there is a ritual verification of the subject and its autonomy, and a denial of objectification. The assertion of autonomy rightly allows responsibility to be ascribed; but it can also obscure the fact that people are conditioned by forces, included those of the group, that they cannot control. Given the individualism of such groups, it is ironical that the assertion of autonomy contrasts so starkly against the uniformity (objectivity) of political practice in many groups.

The radical dissociation of subject and object is a condition that marks the

present epoch. Some writers cast back into prehistory or project into the future a time in which these two facets meld. I'm not really interested in this: we are faced with this break and must work around it, accommodate it through a constant critical reflection in which, with each look over our shoulder, we catch a glimpse of the objective factors that have made us behave in the ways we have. As such, it is necessary to admit the tenuousness, the ambivalence and uncertainty of all our actions, and to somehow introduce this into the structure of libertarian organization.



① GROUP
AGENDA

1. RITUAL LIBERTARIAN
HAND-WRINGING &
DISCLAIMERS
2. CARRY ON AS
NORMAL -
AUTHORITARIAN,
PATRIARCHAL,
ELITIST etc.
3. A.O.B.