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Lone Wolf Collective — May 1982
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This leaflet is dedicated to Richie Stock (1957-1981)

*"In the landscape of Spring
there is neither better nor worse;
The flowering branches grow naturally,
some long, some short."*

Zen poem —

Lone Wolf

Bulletin no. 4



THE DEBATE ON SKILLFUL MEANS: Revolutionary Anarchism vs. Evolutionary Anarchism

*"... to the great Taoists, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, it was
obvious that one could not be right without also being wrong,
because the two were as inseparable as back and front."*

Alan Watts —
Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen

Today a lot of energetic people are getting together around anarchism. The signs of life are in evidence throughout the progressive Left. It looks healthy and it looks inevitable. A considerable amount of quiet controversy is bubbling away inside this newly re-gathering anarchist world. Perhaps this too was inevitable, as we adjusted method to fit new conditions; and there is reason to hope that this controversy, too, will prove to be healthy and beneficial.

One controversy is tending to split anarchists into two camps, and we will start by admitting that we do not think there is any truly important difference between the groupings of anarchists who are fueling this debate. Some persons may be outraged by such a remark, but it is basically a matter of attention or focus. We will try to present the apparent conflicting stances of both sides and detail the arguments for certain strategies and tactics, because the controversy is in fact an old battle over long-term and short-term tactics or means. The anarchist goal itself is not in question; we are all agreed that we seek to construct a non-hierarchical, non-statist, non-capitalist, non-sexist and non-ethnocentric world where freedom, justice and community can thrive; common to all anarchist commitment is the drive to free society of the coercive institutions which stand in the way of the development of a free humanity.

Anarchist society is immensely diverse today; but, among the left-activist population, we will here consider some of those who fall into two general currents of concern or activity: (1) the class-struggle, work-place oriented militants; and (2) the community-based, ecology-conscious radical "lifestylers", often jokingly or half-disparagingly called "hippie anarchists". All may be called devoted direct-actionists, and of course it is common to find many individuals who "cross the lines" between the groups.

In the debate on means, most members of group one consider themselves revolutionary anarchists (the true heirs of Bakunin, the syndicalists, and the anarcho-communists), while those of group two generally consider themselves evolutionary anarchists or anarcho-communitarians who have brought together a quiet movement out of the 1960s counter-culture and take their faith as much from Tostoy and Gandhi as from Kropotkin and Gustav Landauer.

The focus of the workplace militants is on their traditional role as workers exploited by a boss from whom they receive a wage. Their goal is to make a revolution by seizing the means of production, and other necessary property, establishing themselves in collective control and as total self-managers, putting an end forever to monopoly capitalism and the state (the latter being always the instrument of the former). These revolutionaries see the workplace as proper revolutionary ground and labor unions or worker federations as proper revolutionary forces.

The evolutionary anarchists (or gradualists, "reformers", etc.) tend to see the working class as much seduced into All-American consumerism and/or too substantially reactionary to fulfill its one-time revolutionary potential. They are convinced that the community is the proper base for creating far-reaching social and political change. Generally these anarcho-communitarians choose to live in rural areas rather than in large industrial cities, and they see themselves as part of a back-to-basics, back-to-the-land movement.

The revolutionary anarchists decline to put faith in retreating to the good simple rural life or creating buyer cooperatives, barter outlets, collective businesses or similar group economic efforts (co-ops, they say, are still within the capitalist system and you might well be exploiting yourself by working for less money than

you could get under a boss); they also hold that wage-earners most usually do not have the capital resources to start their own businesses or outlets.

The evolutionary anarchists, seeing little chance of overthrowing corporate capitalism or erasing the state anytime soon, claim the perspective of workplace militants is too narrow and self-defeating (that there are many good ways to build economic survival and relative independence, and a broad community life is richer in possibilities than too heavy a focus on workplace). The evolutionists

"There has not been one revolution in the world's history which was carried out by the working people in their own interests — by urban workers and poor peasants who do not exploit the work of others. Although the main force of all great revolutions consisted of workers and peasants, who made innumerable sacrifices for their success, the leaders, ideologists and organizers of the forms and goals of the revolution were invariably neither worker nor peasants, but elements foreign to the workers and peasants, generally intermediaries who hesitated between the ruling class of the dying epoch and the proletariat of the cities and fields."

Peter Arshinov,
History of the Makhnovist Movement (1921)

These conflicts are strongly felt in the American movement but have also surfaced in Europe where there is a strong tradition of anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist involvement in large labor unions. Reports from Spain — the historic stronghold of anarchist labor militancy — indicate that this very type of factional squabbling is taking place within the ranks of the CNT-FAI. Because of the repression and exile of anarchists following the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39,

admit they are in part cooperating with capitalism and the state; the revolutionary anarchists admit there is no mass base to accomplish — at this time — the revolution we all seek. The first group says you can't make a revolution by eating granola, practicing yoga and dreaming about Vermont — in case you aren't already there. Group two asks, why breathe bad air, pay the light bill, shop at a supermarket and be a part of a soul-busting monolith when clean air, cheap energy and food, and decentralization can all be realities?

there is now a very evident generation gap between the older militants who fought in or witnessed the anarchist revolution and civil war, and those "long-haired hotheads" who were born after 1945. The new concern with broad ecological issues, sexual liberation, and a fully expansive lifestyle has caused more division in Spain than in the relatively calm anarchist groupings here of the 1970s and '80s.

The debate on the most skillful means for building the world we want is of genuine concern and has surfaced in the American anarchist press in recent issues of "Strike!", "Black & Green", "Open Road", "Social Anarchism", and "Ideas and Action". It is fine that people are puzzling over these issues and making themselves heard; and when one looks at the full range of demands and particulars involved in bringing change or in keeping oneself alive in such a dangerous world, it is possible to see that both sides are, fundamentally, correct. There are revolutionary changes that have been achieved through "evolutionary" methods, and there are evolutionary or gradualist achievements that have been gained by "revolutionary" means. There is full merit to all beliefs of what must be done by both sides, while the skepticism about self-defeating tactics is perfectly sound.

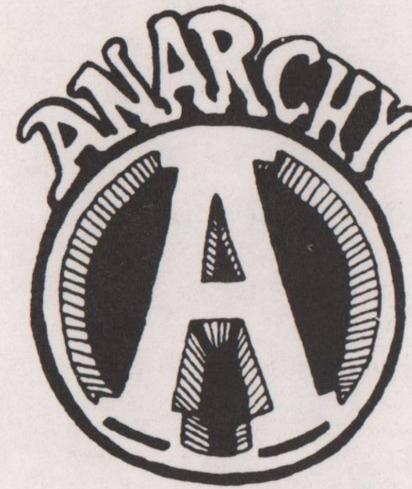
Workplace organizing, union efforts, property appropriation, self-management, co-ops, communal farms — all of these tools or approaches — have been tried at one time or another. Some have gained a small success and altered lives for the better; many have failed and been judged wasteful efforts. Anarchists have a long history of success and failure to reflect on, and we also have a knowledge of how Marxists and social democrats have failed and undercut themselves by being either too absurdly ideological — rather than just sensibly human — or too reform-minded and cooperative with those in power when they might have grabbed an

opportunity to smash Capital, and make a true revolution in line with what they preach. (The most often recalled "undercutting" is probably in Britain's Fabian Socialists, whose dis-arming gradualist approach may have prevented the social confrontation which could have unseated the English ruling class and broken the institutions that maintain one of history's cruelist class systems. Of course, the Fabians were in large part members of the British high bourgeoisie and several key figures were connected to the peerage.)

This debate is all very healthy, but we wonder if we might also move along at this point and take another direction. While considering the issues already raised, let's focus on other economic, ecological and class-system realities that are apparent today: the class system in North America does not really fit the strict, standard Marxist line; foolish consumerism and the poisoning of the biosphere are inescapable facts which must be added to any analysis or strategy; our once fertile soil is disappearing as rapidly as hardy new destructive insect types are being created; nuclear war grows closer by the moment; ethnic groups are still divided from one another by intense hostility; large-scale economic collapse could pull ALL of us under; personal alienation assures violence in our public and private lives — while apathy and self-centeredness are our cultural norms; and the factory and the farm in Vermont are only a very small part of a very big whole.

"Effective revolutionary action does not spring from 'individual' or 'external' needs — it can only occur when the two coincide so that the distinction itself breaks down. Every group must find its own form, take its own action, and speak its own language. When all have learnt to express themselves, in harmony with the rest, we shall have a free society."

Daniel Cohn-Bendit,
Obsolete Communism (1968)



The new vitality of the current continental anarchist movement allows us a fresh opportunity to do something more than draw factional battle lines against each other; we can join together in building a pluralistic strategy for revolution which is suited to the complex range of problems anarchists and our less committed friends face together. Building an anarchist program of direct action is not like building a socialist party or an environmentalist cabal. There are no wine-and-cheese parties and no placing of candidates for office in Wards 1 and 2. We do not participate in The System to gain control of it; an anarchist revolution must be for all people, and we begin by directly creating the alternatives that are the base of the just society. Perhaps the time is upon us to push aside our minor differences and join in an effort which would include:

(1.) full workplace activism with a plan for complete worker control wherever we are employed; (2.) coalition building and support work with groups of the progressive left — while keeping a cautious eye open for those old faithfuls, the authoritarian Marxist-Leninists and the career-conscious social democrats; (3.) non-stop and enterprising propaganda and outreach so that people may finally learn about the practicality of anarchism and that, in fact, the anarchist movement did not disappear in the 1890s; (4.) creation of new co-operatives and collectives to provide jobs, services and decent food at near-cost (the big boys will disappear only when we make them irrelevant. Starve the bastards out!); and (5.) the building of collectively-managed, relatively self-sufficient, energy-renewable communities which can organize to exist free of governments, corporations, and other institutions of economic, cultural and class-level oppression. Nothing short of the local and regional weight of a combination of worker councils plus neighborhood and community organizations can provide the extra-parliamentary force to erode the controls of state and monopoly capitalism.

Surely by now we are ready for a new beginning. And no one need sit back and feel despondant. In the process of change that we have before us, there will be work enough for all.

"Those who would have good government without its correlative misrule, and right without its correlative wrong, do not understand the principles of the universe."

Chuang-tzu