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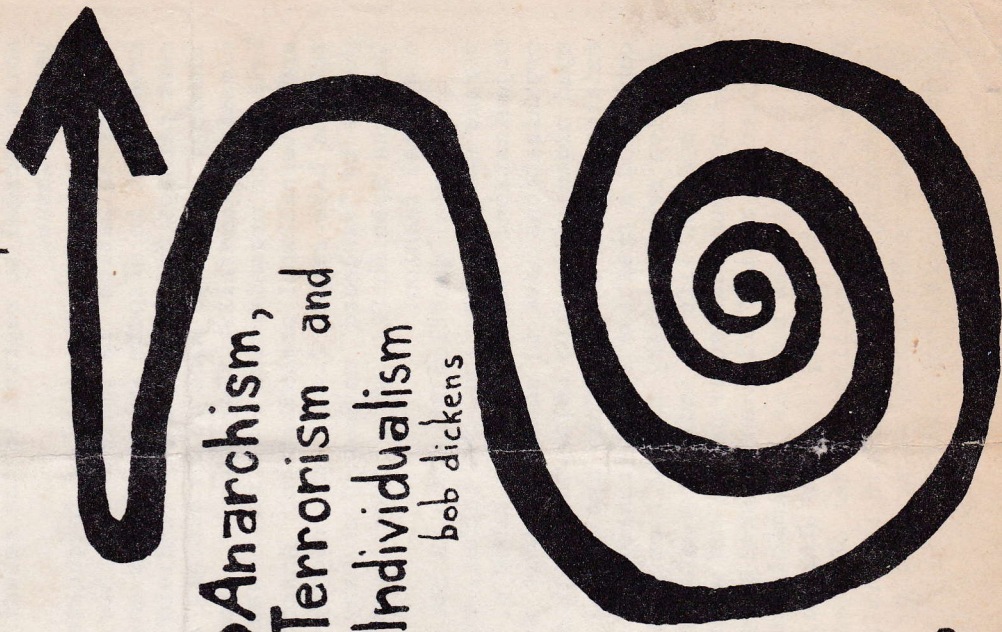


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Anarchy and Organization

murray bookchin

Anarchism,
Terrorism and
Individualism
bob dickens



ANARCHY AND ORGANIZATION
A Letter To The Left

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There is a noary myth that anarchists do not believe in organization to promote revolutionary activity. This myth was raised from its resting place by Marcuse in a L'Express interview some months ago and reiterated again by Huey Newton in his "In Defence of Self-Defense," which New Left Notes decided to reprint in the recent National Convention issue.

To argue the question of "organization" versus "non-organization" is ridiculous; this issue has never been in dispute among serious anarchists, except perhaps for those lonely "individualists" whose ideology is rooted more in an extreme variant of classical liberalism than anarchy. Yes, anarchists believe in organization - in national organization and international organization. Anarchist organizations have ranged from loose, highly decentralized groups to "vanguard" movements of many thousands, like the Spanish FAI, which functioned in a highly concerted fashion.

The real question at issue is not organization versus non-organization, but rather, what kind of organization. What different kinds of anarchist organizations have in common is that they are developed organically from below, not engineered into existence from above. They are social movements, combining a creative revolutionary life-style with a creative revolutionary theory, not political parties, whose mode of life is indistinguishable from the surrounding bourgeois environment and whose ideology is reduced to rigid "tried-and-tested programs." They try to reflect as much as is humanly possible the liberated society they seek to achieve, not slavishly duplicate the prevailing system of hierarchy, class, and authority. They are built around intimate groups of brothers and sisters, whose ability to act in common is based on initiative,

convictions freely arrived at, and deep personal involvement, not a bureaucratic apparatus, fleshed out by docile memberships and manipulated from the top by a handful of all-knowing "leaders."

I don't know who Huey is arguing with when he speaks of "anarchists" who believe all they have to do is "just express themselves individually" in order to achieve freedom. Tim Leary? Allen Ginsberg? The Beatles? Certainly not the revolutionary anarchist communists I know -- and I know a large and fairly representative number. Nor is it clear to me where Huey acquired his facts on the May-June revolt in France. The "Communist Party and the other progressive (!) parties" of the French "Left" hadn't merely "lagged behind the people," as Huey seems to believe; these "disciplined" and "centralized" organizations tried in every way to obstruct the revolution and re-direct it back into traditional parliamentary channels. Even the "disciplined," "centralized" Trotskyist FER and the Maoist groups opposed the revolutionary students as "ultra-leftists," "adventurists," and "romantics" right up to the first street fighting in May. Characteristically, most of the "disciplined," "centralized" organizations of the French "Left" either lagged outrageously behind the events or, in the case of the "Communist Party and progressive parties," shamelessly betrayed the students and workers to the system.

I find it curious that while Huey accuses the French Stalinist hacks of merely having "lagged behind the people" he holds the anarchists and Danny Cohn-Bendit responsible for the people being "forced to turn back to DeGaulle." I visited France shortly after the May-June revolt and I can substantiate without the least difficulty how resolutely Danny Cohn-Bendit, the March 22nd Movement, and the anarchists tried to develop the assembly forms and action committees into a "structural program" (indeed, it went far beyond mere "program") to replace the DeGaulle government. I could show quite clearly how they tried to get the workers to retain their hold on the factories and establish direct economic contacts with the peasants: in short, how they tried to replace the French political and economic structure by creative, viable revolutionary forms. In this, they

met with continual obstruction from the "disciplined," "centralized" parties of the French "Left," including a number of Trotskyist and Maoist sects.

There is another myth that needs to be exploded -- the myth that social revolutions are made by tightly disciplined cadres, guided by a highly centralized leadership. All the great social revolutions are the work of deep-seated historic forces and traditions to which the revolutionary and his organization contributes very little and, in most cases, completely misjudges. The revolutions themselves break out spontaneously. The "glorious party" usually lags behind these events -- and, if the uprising is successful, steps in to commandeer, manipulate, and almost invariably distort it. It is then that the revolution reaches its real period of crises: will the "glorious party" re-create another system of hierarchy, domination and power in its sacred mission to "protect the revolution," or will it be dissolved into the revolution together with the dissolution of hierarchy, domination and power as such? If a revolutionary organization is not structured to dissolve into the popular forms created by the revolution once its function as a catalyst is completed; if its own forms are not similar to the libertarian society it seeks to create, so that it can disappear into the revolutionary forms of the future -- then the organization becomes a vehicle for carrying the forms of the past into the revolution. It becomes a self-perpetuating organism, a state machine that, far from "withering away", perpetuates all the archaic conditions for its own existence.

There is far more myth than reality to the claim that a tightly "centralized" and "disciplined" party promotes the success of a revolution. The Bolsheviks were split, divided, and riddled by factional strife from October, 1917 to March, 1921. Ironically, it was only after the last White armies had been expelled from Russia that Lenin managed to completely centralize and discipline his party. Far more real have been the endless betrayals engineered by the hierarchical, "disciplined," highly "centralized" parties of the "Left," such as the Social Democratic and

Communist parties. These betrayals were not accidental. They followed almost inexorably from the fact that every organization (however revolutionary its rhetoric and however well-intentioned its goals) which models itself structurally on the very system it seeks to overthrow becomes assimilated and subverted by bourgeois relations. Its seeming effectiveness becomes the source of its greatest failures.

Undeniably problems arise which can be solved only by committees, by co-ordination, and by a high measure of self-discipline. To the anarchist, committees must be limited to the practical tasks that necessitate their existence, and they must disappear once their functions are completed. Co-ordination and self-discipline must be achieved voluntarily, by virtue of the high moral and intellectual caliber of the revolutionary. To seek less than this is to accept, as a "revolutionary," a mindless robot, a creature of authoritarian training, a manipulable agent whose personality and outlook are utterly alien, indeed antithetical, to any society that could be remotely regarded as free.

No serious anarchist will disagree with Huey's plea on the "necessity for wiping out the imperialist structure by organized groups." If at all possible we must work together. We must recognize too, that in the United States, the heartland of world imperialism today, an economy and technology has been developed which could remove, almost overnight, all the problems that Marx once believed justified the need for a state. It would be a disastrous error to deal with an economy of potential abundance and cybernated production from a theoretical position which was still rooted in a technological era based on coal, crude machines, long hours of toil, and material scarcity. It is time we stop trying to learn from Mao's China and Castro's Cuba -- and see the remarkable economic reality under our very eyes for all men to enjoy once the American bourgeois colossus can be tumbled and its resources brought to the service of humanity.

Murray Bookchin
Anarchos magazine

ANARCHISM, TERRORISM AND INDIVIDUALISM

A great variety of groups and tendencies of groups are being called anarchist these days. Most of them are so far from the thinking of serious anarchists and from the positive projections of anarchist thought that one might almost be driven to give up using the term. Nevertheless, one can attempt some redemption of the term. This is what I propose to do in this short essay.

Terrorism was condoned by Bakunin during that phase of his life in which he was under the influence of Mechaev, but Bakunin could also say that:

Destructive action is ever determined -- not only its essence and the degree of its intensity, but likewise the means used by it -- by the positive ideal which constitutes its initial inspiration, its soul.

Other anarchists, such as Nicolas Walter, have been even harder in condemning "the streak of psychopathic violence" which has run through anarchism. This sort of streak, whether it surfaces as terrorism or in assassinations, is not peculiar to anarchism. There is such a streak in any movement for radical change. To claim that terrorism is peculiarly anarchist is to do an injustice to anarchism and to history. Worse, it is to fall into the trap of accepting the word of the bourgeois media as infallible. Actually, terrorism may be more closely allied, in the United States, with paid provocateurs than with any particular part of the movement.

Whereas, terrorism is a relatively simple subject to deal with, individualism is far more complex due to its great variety of forms. It is partially true, as Vine Deloria (a Sioux leader) points out, that:

The "do-your-thing" doctrine of youth presents the ultimate challenge to American society, for it challenges society to expand its conception of the individual beyond the field of economics.... "Doing-your-thing" speaks of what a man IS, not what he HAS.

On the other hand, such a doctrine can also mean that one does not have to coordinate with others in a community.

In this form it simply confirms the reactionary's definition of anarchism as chaos. Hence, it is important to understand that anarchism does not imply that total lack of organization which would lead to chaos. Anarchism does not accept bourgeois organization style either. In particular, it cannot accept elitism. Being neither elitist nor individualistic is difficult. If one person knows more than another about a particular subject, it is not elitist for him to teach what he knows. In fact, it would be both individualistic and elitist for him not to teach it. But he must teach in such a way as to make it ultimately unnecessary for him to maintain the teaching position. The same is true of organizers. The charge of elitism is too often a cop-out. Too often it is a cover for the sort of individualism that means do your thing, but ends up as do nothing except complain that someone else is doing something. The Cohn-Bendits claim that:

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. This is the positive spirit of anarchism -- of an anarchism which requires organization and decries elitism and individualism. This is also the spirit of tribalism. Vine Deloria claims that, "The contest of the future is between a return to the castle or the tipi." In its own way, anarchism affirms the tipi. If there is to be a future, it will be discovered in the past, in the actual existence of communities and in their differences as well as their similarities.

To a world knowing only the corporation, this vision will come hard, but it will not come by elitist terrorism (even where the motives are beautiful), and it will not come by imitating the elitist, individualistic world of the bourgeoisie. It will come when people are willing to take the responsibility of organizing themselves into groups, in their own ways, to meet their own needs.

Bob Dickens