

An
Anarchist
Reader

for effective organising



Foreword

This reader is a collection of texts that we, the Zabalaza Books editors, recently came across. The reason they are published together here in this format is that we feel that they all contain valuable ideas for making our struggle more effective and that, because of this, they should be read by as many of our movement's organisers as possible.

The one point of contention in these articles is the "We must stop trying to build a movement of anarchists and instead fight for an anarchistic movement" sentence in the first article *Active Revolution* by James Mumm. A response to this, and one with which we agree, is covered by the Editors note from the comrades from the North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists found after the article. Another idea that comes to mind in this regard is that it could be argued that we should **shift our emphasis** from building our anarchist organisations to building anarchistic movements, as building the organisation very often comes across as just another form of party building to those in the mass organisations of our class that we may be organising with. The alternative being that those in the mass organisations, coming across our ideas, will find them worthwhile **and come to us**; thereby making their commitment to our ideas and political organisations that much stronger. This however is not explicit in the sentence in James Mumm's otherwise excellent article so is probably not what he had in mind.

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Active Revolution

James Mumm

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Part I: Anarchist, Grassroots Dual Power

Dual Power Defined

The term “Dual Power” has been used in several ways since it was first coined. The following definition builds on the previous meanings of Dual Power, most importantly by articulating the equal and necessary relationship between counter-power and counter-institutions. In the original definition, dual power referred to the creation of an alternative, liberatory power to exist alongside and eventually overcome state/capitalist power.

Dual power theorizes a distinct and oppositional relationship between the forces of the state/capitalism and the revolutionary forces of oppressed people. The two can never be peacefully reconciled.

With the theory of dual power is a dual strategy of public resistance to oppression (counter-power) and building co-operative alternatives (counter-institutions). Public resistance to oppression encompasses all of the direct action and protest movements that fight authoritarianism, capitalism, racism, sexism, homophobia,

and the other institutionalised oppressions. Building co-operative alternatives recreates the social and economic relationships of society to replace competitive with co-operative structures.

It is critical that these two general modes of action do not become isolated within a given movement. Counter-power and counter-institutional organisations must be in relationship to each other. The value of reconnecting counter-institutional organisations with explicitly oppositional counter-power organisations is a safeguard against the former's tendency to become less radical over time. As counter-power organisations are reconnected to their base, they ground their political analysis in the concrete experience of counter-institutions — mitigating against the potential political "distance" between their rhetoric and the consciousness of their families, fellow workers and neighbours.

Dual power does not imply a dual set of principles, and therefore processes — one for public resistance and other for building co-operative alternatives. The process used for both strategic directions has the same set of principles at its root. The anarchist principles of direct democracy, co-operation and mutual aid have practical implications that inform the dual power strategies for revolution.

Direct democracy means that people accept the right and responsibility to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

Co-operation means that our social and economic structure is egalitarian, that we co-operate instead of compete to fulfil our needs and desires.

Mutual aid means that we share our resources between individuals and groups toward universal need and desire fulfilment.

These principles lend us the foundation for creating inclusive, anti-authoritarian relationships as we work in grassroots organisations. Regardless of the strategic direction within dual power that is being pursued, we will follow the same process — building relationships, organising these relationships into groups, and moving these groups toward collective action.

We organise in order to build power with others — power that gives us the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect our lives. It is in the conscious construction and use of this power that we find true democracy.

Part II: Defining a Process for Revolutionary Social Change

Liberation is the struggle to be fully present, to have the ability to act — to become powerful, relevant and therefore historical. Liberation through action is one of the ways in which people experience such self-actualising transformation. Of course, liberation can also take place through other means — chief among these are popular education, cultural work and identity-based activity.

But, in our complex and oppressive society, a holistic strategy for liberation must be multi-faceted and geared toward some measure of action.

Once we get beyond this general agreement on the centrality of action to liberation, the debate on the specifics of action begins. There is a clear distinction between the three most common forms of action in the United States — activism, advocacy and organising. Their effectiveness as strategies for change is at the heart of this essay. First, a summary of each strategy:

Activism — An activist is a person who is responsible to a defined issue and who helps address that issue through mobilizing a base of people to take collective action. Activists are accountable to themselves as moral actors on a specific issue. Democratic structures are a utilitarian consequence of activities designed to win on the defined issue (my definition).

Advocacy — An advocate is a person who is responsible to a defined issue and who helps address that issue through collective action that uses the instruments of democracy to establish and implement laws and policies that will create a just and equitable society (Advocacy Institute).

Organising — An organiser is a person who is responsible to a defined constituency and who helps build that constituency through leadership development, collective action and the development of democratic structures (National Organisers Alliance).

To clarify, power is simply the ability to act — and it can be used over or with others. As anarchists, power with others forms the core of our belief system. In each of the above strategies, power is gained through collective action — how each uses that power begins to illuminate considerable differences. The democratic structures created to focus that power also shed light on these differences.

Relationships form the foundation of all collective action. The intentionality of those relationships determines if your primary commitment is to your constituency or to the issue around which a constituency is built.

People participate in collective action because they have a self-interest in doing so. Self-interest is a middle ground between selfishness and self-sacrifice, determined most practically by the activities in which people spend their time, energy and money. Self-interest is the activity of the individual in relation to others. It is in the self-interest of people to participate in social change because such activities resonate with a need or desire within themselves. Thus, people choose issues or organisations because something about them is in their self-interest.

In addition to a shared commitment to collective action — power, relationships and self-interest are all critical elements that the three strategies of action have in common. The differences emerge in the use of power, the degree of intentionality placed on relationship-building, and the emphasis on issue or organisation as the point of connection between people.

1. Use of Power

Activists and advocates use power primarily to win on issues. Given that power is currently derived from two sources — people and money — activists and advocates try to mobilize a quantity of each to affect change. More often than not this means mobilizing a lot of people, and a little bit of money. These two strategies differ in that advocacy is explicitly about altering the relations of power in the established institutions of society, while activism doesn't necessarily place its faith in the perfectibility of American democratic institutions.

Advocates make a serious error in not differentiating power over others and power with others. They try to negotiate for a change in the relations of power between oppressor and oppressed, failing to understand that these two conceptions of power cannot be peacefully reconciled. Advocates end up negotiating to share power over others, and in doing so find themselves transformed.

No longer are they building power with others, but power for others — which is just a lighter shade of power over others. The struggle between these two types of power is a zero sum game — as one wins, the other loses. Only power with others is limitless; power over others always implies a finite amount of power.

Activism's power is derived first from its ability to affect change on issues and secondly on the potential force for change embodied in organised people. Organising uses power differently — by first building an organisation. For organisers, issues are a means to an end (the development of peoples' capacity to affect change). Organisers' use of power with others to alter the relations of power over others inherent in government or capitalist corporations forces such authoritarian groups into a debilitating contradiction. Opening such contradictions creates room for change. Authoritarian institutions may well react with violence to preserve power over others, or these contradictions may result in real social change. Liberation and revolution take place as relationships change from authoritarian to egalitarian.

Too often organisers and their organisations fall prey to the same negative transformation as advocates — in negotiation to alter the relations of power they begin to build power for others rather than power with others. The authoritarian government and capitalist system are frighteningly seductive. They promise to change incrementally, and then slowly lull organisers, advocates and activists into a reformist sleep. However, the strength of organising lies in the deliberate construction of a constituency that holds itself, its organisation and its organisers publicly accountable. A commitment to relationships rather than issues is key to public accountability, and to insuring a lasting dedication to building power with others.

2. Relationship-Building

All action has the potential to be liberatory. However, it is the degree of intentionality placed on relationship-building that determines the quality of the learning that takes place. Organisers differentiate between public and private relationships. Public relationships are those in which there is an agreement between people to act and reflect together in the process of social change. Organisers cultivate deliberate public relationships and bring people together in situations that foster relationship-building among those taking action. Intentional reflection upon action is key to maximizing learning. In organising, people recognize relationships — not issues — as the foundation of their organisations.

Activism and advocacy use relationships as a means to an end — victory on an issue. Relationships are an end in themselves for organisers. This element of the debate centres on the question of constituency. The constituency of activism is other activists and potential activists, motivated through their individual moral commitments to a given issue. Advocates have no primary constituency. The constituency of an organiser is the universe of people who are potential members of a given organisation with a defined geographical area or non-geographical base (through affinity or identity).

3. Issue vs. Organisation

Relationships are built between people; only through abstraction can we say that people have relationships with institutions or issues. There is an inherent contradiction in activism's attempts to mobilize people around an issue, given that issues are conceptual while people actually exist. People are not in relationship with issues — they can only be in relationship with other people.

Organisations provide the context for public relationships. As anarchists we build organisations based on the 'power with others', non-hierarchical model. We believe in organisation — how much and in what form are the debatable points. But, as anarchists, we know that organisation is necessary as a vehicle for collective action.

Multiple dynamic relationships (organisations) are the product of an organiser's work. For activists, organisations are a utilitarian consequence of their work on a given issue. And for advocates, they are a utilitarian tool used to negotiate for power. Organisers trust in the ability of people to define their own issues, a faith that rests in the knowledge that maximizing the quantity and quality of relationships produces dynamic organisations and therefore dynamic change. Advocates synthesize issues from a dialogue between people and dominant institutions, and they struggle for practical changes to the "system." Activists engage in continuous analysis of issues, producing clear and poignant agendas for social change — and then rally people around those agendas.

The problem of "distance" is primarily one of both activism and advocacy. People who spend a great deal of time developing an issue have a tendency to create an analysis that is significantly different than that of most other people. As the distance increases between the depth of understanding between an activist or advocate and that of other people, we find increasing polarization. Such distance can breed a vicious cycle of isolation.

4. Revolutionary Social Change

Perhaps the greatest difference between these three strategies of action is in their ability over to time to create revolutionary change. In the final analysis — primary commitment to an issue is in contradiction to a primary commitment to power with others. The faith of anarchists lies in the ability of people to govern themselves — on holding power with others. This faith implies a staggering level of trust in others, and a monumental commitment on a personal level to participate publicly in social change. Activism and advocacy have no such trust in others — their faith is in their analysis of, and moral commitment to, an issue. By putting their faith in an issue they are removing their faith from people. Relationships do not form the basis for their action, and therefore they cannot be said to have a primary commitment to power with others. Of the three strategies of action, only organising has a primary commitment to people — to power with others — and to anarchism.

The modern anarchist conception of dual power encourages us to build liberatory institutions while we fight the oppression of the dominant system. Activism and organising exist in both arenas, while advocacy exists only in the latter.

There is room to construct and practice a fresh revolutionary organising process that is relevant to our current historical context. Aspects of such a revolutionary program would certainly incorporate radical social service, counter-institutional economic development, counter-power, educational and cultural dimensions. To maximize our effectiveness, it is important to define our strategy for action clearly across the range of possible activities and organisations.

As a model approach, organising offers a starting point for a strategic social change process. Advocacy, as a contradictory and liberal strategy, may be necessary in order to keep the system from degenerating at a faster pace but it is insufficient for anarchists interested in revolutionary change. Activism is flawed by its insistence on elevating issues over relationships and its tendency to use organisation and people as means to an end.

Organising begins when we make a commitment to develop the capacity of ourselves and those people with whom we work to affect change. The intensity of conscious action and reflection is the engine that drives organisers to build relationships, construct dynamic organisations, and move those relationships into collective action. As anarchists we must learn the theory and practice of organising if we are truly committed to revolutionary change.

5. Organising Theory/Organising Skills

A holistic framework of effective organising (through community, labour or issue-based organisations) must include some conception of relationships, self-interest, power, and organisation. Again, relationships are the means with which we communicate and regulate our social existence. Relationships are always political, and as such are the foundation of all conceptions of power. Self-interest is the self in relationship to others, and signifies our political bonds and individual priorities for how we spend our time, energy and money. Power is simply the ability to act, and can be used as either power with others or power over others. Organisations are social constructs with which power is exercised.

The skills of effective organising are all geared toward building relationships, organising those relationships into groups and moving those groups into collective action. One-on-one meetings are structured conversations that allow each person to share their experiences toward identifying their individual and mutual self-interests. These meetings may be scheduled, or they may take place going door-to-door, house-to-house, or over the phone. A network of one-on-one relationships can be increased exponentially by asking people to hold “house meetings” where people invite their own networks (family, friends, neighbours or co-workers). Through this process we can identify people who are potential leaders — people with a sense of humour, a vision of a better world, a willingness to work with others, and a desire to learn and grow in the context of action. As relationships are built between leaders, organisations are formed which can move into action on collectively defined issues.

This is the critical point — it doesn't matter what issue people choose to work on. And we shouldn't steer people in a direction that we think is better or more radical. Organising is not about identifying an issue and rallying or mobilizing people around it. Organising is about building organisations that can wield collective power. Action may begin as reform to the existing system, and that is OK. We cannot expect people to take radical action if they have not yet given up on the “system.” It is our job to encourage action in many forms, and to reflect upon that action in order to learn from it. We must trust that such action and reflection will radicalise people over time.

Finally, how do we organise non-anarchists, or more seriously, people with different class, race, cultural backgrounds from ourselves, or do we? We must begin by locating ourselves in the complex matrix of oppression. What is your identity, in what ways do you experience oppression? In this way we can identify the social networks in which we either have relationships, or because of our identity could readily form relationships.

Then we must ask ourselves — where do we want to have an impact? In what communities can we identify a constituency for our organising efforts? Do we have a common identity with these identified communities? If not, why do we consider them a possible constituency?

It is very important to identify the constituency in which we want to have an impact before we identify issues that we will work on. To do otherwise takes us backward, and initiates an authoritarian process in which we are dictating issues to a constituency.

Getting back to the question — is it wrong for an organiser to define a constituency that is not a part of their history or identity? Should we concentrate on organising within our own communities? I cannot answer these questions for you — I simply don't have the answers. But, I do know that they are critical and must be resolved before an organising or popular education project may begin.

6. Active Participation by Anarchists in Community, Education, Labour and Issue-based Organisations

It is not a concession to liberalism, nor a descent into reformism, for revolutionaries to participate actively in organisations that are not explicitly radical. Neither are we their vanguard. The only realistic way to build a mass movement is to work directly with oppressed people — in essence, we are transformed as we transform others.

We join existing organisations to build our skills in the realm of political action. Through immersion in grassroots struggles we develop an understanding of the process of radicalisation — beginning where people are at, using dialogue and research to build our collective analysis, taking action, and reflecting upon that action in an ongoing circular process.

There are some hard learned truths in these ideas. First, your vision of a better world is incomplete and impotent without the participation of grassroots people in its construction.

Second, you cannot impose your ideas, however radical you think they are and however backward you think others' beliefs are, without compromising anarchist principles. So then, how do we move forward?

Participation in existing organisations allows us to gain experience in political action. We can then use this experience to create new organisations that are based more closely on anarchist principles, but which are still dedicated to a grassroots base. But, you should not presume that you are ready to start a grassroots organisation without having a clear idea on how to build and sustain such a group. That is why I encourage you to learn from the many models of organising and education that are currently operating in the world before you strike out on your own.

Part III: Concrete Directions for Dual Power

1. Current Anarchist Forms of Organisation

Anarchists have used a wide array of organisational forms and strategies of action in the past one hundred and fifty years:

Collectives: Cadre organisations (or closed collectives) and open collectives closely resonate with an activist strategy. Infoshops, for example, operate as open collectives. As activist groups, they tend to coalesce around an issue — in this case anarchism itself. Most infoshops of the 1990s who attempted to move beyond the limitations of activism were hampered by theoretical and practical barriers. The Beehive (Washington, DC), Emma Center (Minneapolis, MN) and the A-Zone's (Chicago, IL) attempts at anti-gentrification organising have been intermittent and rarely effective. Issues and analysis must be developed in conjunction with the people affected by those given issues, or the separation between people and analysis leads to vanguardist distance. You cannot be an ally without first choosing the method of alliance — what is your relationship to the people affected by an issue, and how will your organisational form contribute to effective work on that issue? These are central questions for anarchists operating on a local level and who are interested in grassroots struggle.

Worker/Consumer Co-operatives: Worker co-operatives are a special category of closed collectives — as consumer co-operatives are of open collectives. As needs-based organisations, they combine elements of activist and organising strategies. It is critical for grassroots co-operatives to commit themselves to organising's participatory model of action, but it is also vital that they are allowed the space to try out new ideas. With a careful eye to the issue of distance, co-operatives are an effective means of organisation.

Mass-based Organisations: Mass-based organisations, like the IWW, have the potential to be influential elements of a popular revolutionary movement. There is no effective way to build

a mass-based organisation except through organising. A cursory reading of history shows mass-based organisations growing as movements spring up in response to injustice — and then they fade away when justice is met. This conception of history ignores the countless years of work that go into every “spontaneous” movement. Spain had a revolutionary anarchist movement in 1936 because of the incredible organising that began there in the 1860s.

Intermediary Organisations: Organisations that directly encourage the creation and development of the above forms of organisation are necessary adjuncts to a holistic conception of revolutionary organising. In an anarchist model, intermediary organisations are most effective in the form of a confederation. Intermediaries can provide:

Dialogue and Action — as a political formation, counter-institutional and counter-power organisations would come together to engage in revolutionary praxis (action and reflection).

Training — on the basics of organising, facilitation, issue analysis, direct action techniques, organisational, issue and membership development, etc.

Technical Assistance — participatory research on issues, access to technology, technical knowledge on the “how-tos” of things like forming economic or housing co-operatives (where to get money, how to get started, etc.).

Financial Assistance — grassroots fundraising, grant writing, and the investigation and implementation of resource pools.

The point is that anarchists must think strategically about their forms of organisation and strategies of action within a particular historical context. We must make conscious and informed decisions about the prospects for effective revolutionary social change that are either enhanced or limited by our choices of organisation and action.

2. Becoming More Radical and More Grassroots

More than fifteen years of modern anarchist gatherings, conferences and events haven’t led to a coherent anarchist movement — on a continental, regional or local level. This is significant because other groups of people, similarly collected together on the basis of political or issue affinity have developed a higher degree of movement organisation. Why? First, anarchists have tended to form organisations that are not integrated with a grassroots base and, second, anarchists have not built effective intermediary organisations.

The lack of a grassroots base is the result of an anti-mass conception of organisation among anarchists. Favouring collectives, anarchists have constructed insular groups that are simply not relevant to the lives of their families, neighbours and co-workers. While collective organisation is useful under certain conditions, it is not conducive to building a movement, which implies a much higher level of mass participation. Learning organising and popular education theories and skills is the answer for anarchists interested in building a broad-based and diverse movement.

Additionally, North American anarchists have not developed intermediary organisations to connect locally organised radical groups with each other, and then to regional/national/continental networks. Anarchists seem hell-bent on remaining a collection of individual people and their individual groups due to a reluctance to be accountable to a wider constituency through engaging in the process of strategic organising and popular education. Simply arguing for a network (locally or continentally), presumably for communication and mutual aid, also hasn’t taken off despite numerous tries. And in the case of the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, it did work for almost a decade, but at the expense of losing the local organisations. This does not have to be the case.

We need to develop massive resources of our own — social and economic — if we want to make similarly massive changes in society. Our forms of organisation must infect and transform society away from competition, capitalism and oppression.

The challenge is to initiate broad-based organising and popular education to build both counter-power and counter-institutional organisations and to construct intermediary confederations to connect them. We must stop trying to build a movement of anarchists and instead fight for an anarchistic movement.

Editor's Note

Although we welcome James Mumm's insights and analysis around dual power and grassroots organising, we reject his final conclusion, which claims that anarchists must "stop trying to build a movement of anarchists, and instead fight for an anarchistic movement." Those of us from NEFAC would argue that both are equally necessary.

We do not believe that an activist strategy based solely on anarchist methods of organising (self-organisation, mutual aid, solidarity and direct action) will inevitably lead us any closer towards anarchism. Such a strategy, on its own, only serves to provide a radical veneer and egalitarian legitimacy for liberal-reformist or authoritarian activist trends.

A successful revolution will require that anarchist ideas become the leading ideas within the social movements and popular struggles of the working class. This will not happen spontaneously. We believe that, if only to wage the battle of ideas, anarchist organisations are necessary. The purpose of such organisations, for us, is to connect local grassroots activism to a larger strategy of social revolution; to create an organisational pole for anarchists to develop theory and practice, share skills and experiences, and agitate for explicitly anarchist demands (in opposition to liberal-reformist or authoritarian trends) within our activism.

From *The Northeastern Anarchist*, Issue #4, Spring/Summer 2002 www.nefac.net

Back to the Roots: *Anarchists as Revolutionary Organisers*

Ian Martin

What needs to be done to create a successful, truly liberatory, revolutionary movement? What should an anarchist be doing to help in the creation and construction of such a movement? These are, or at least should be, central questions that anarchists need to be addressing. While they are by no means the only relevant issues, the fact that some anarchists spend so much time on intellectual masturbation instead of tackling these concrete problems of liberation is symptomatic of their distance from real grassroots struggle. For some, anarchism may be an intellectual game, a lifestyle, or simply something to do to pass the time. But for anyone who is truly interested in liberation, in building a free, equal and just society made up of vibrant communities, its time to get our hands dirty. There is no substitute or quick easy fix for organising and movement building. Behind every spontaneous uprising or revolution, there were years of organising work that paved the way and laid the foundations. Such work has been ignored for far too long by those calling themselves anarchists. This distance from grassroots struggle must be eliminated, and anarchists must assume their proper role as revolutionary organisers if they wish to be at all successful in seeing their dreams realized. The reason why anarchists are so cut off and isolated from the people and find themselves sharing in so many of the other flaws of the Left, is because like the Left, anarchists have mostly (in modern times) been activists.

Activists and Organisers

What's the difference between an activist and an organiser? The distinction is quite important. An activist is committed and responsible to an issue; they are what I call 'issue-centred'. The issue can be anything from war to globalisation to anarchism itself. Activists then attempt to rally people around this issue based on individuals' moral commitments and beliefs. For activists, an organisation is simply a means to effect change and win some victories regarding the given issue.

An organiser, by contrast, is committed and responsible to a defined constituency. Or in other words, is responsible to a group of people (students, workers at a workplace, etc.) or a community. Organisers are what I call 'people-centred'. Rather than rally people around some issue, an organiser believes that the important thing is to build relationships between people and transform power dynamics, letting issues be defined by the people themselves. For an organiser, building people's collective power to create change is ultimately more important than victory on an issue. Issues are important insofar as they are a means of building this collective power, radicalising people, and constructing a movement and organisations.

Activism Isolated and Impotent

It can quickly be seen why activism leads to alienation and isolation from ordinary people, and ineffectiveness in bringing about real, revolutionary change. Activists spend their time producing analysis concerning different issues, and then expect people to come flocking to that analysis that was produced by activists in isolation. This process does not let people craft their own analysis or select their own issues. Activism is based around a deep lack of trust in people, and an unwillingness to give control to the masses, who are valuable as bodies in a march but not as participants in theory or guiding a movement. Given this fact, it then becomes a bit absurd when activists start asking, 'Where are the people of colour?' or 'How come only white lefties ever participate?'. Should they be surprised when their lack of trust is returned by those they disdain? No genuine revolution can be built from a strategic model that values an issue above people, and utilizes people as simply a means to an end (shouldn't anarchism be about putting people as the end?). Anarchists have become activists by default over the years, due to a lack of clear organisation and concrete goals, and this needs to change.

Organisers have a fundamental faith and trust in people and their potential, and thus allow them to take part in and guide analysis and issue-selection. Many so-called radicals (and anarchists) seem to fear that ordinary people will make mistakes if given this control. But what is anarchism if not the belief that people are fully able to govern themselves and make the decisions that affect their lives? Certainly our ability to do so is stunted by living in a hierarchal, authoritarian society, but how else will this capacity develop and how else will people learn but through mistakes? Vanguardism is not just a strategy but also a state of mind that thinks that there is a group of enlightened radicals, and everyone else isn't quite at their level yet, so the ordinary folk can't be given control. This mindset must be wiped out, especially from the brains of those who claim to be anarchists.

Letting people define their own issues is key to an organiser. People will obviously be far more committed to fighting for an issue and goal that they have selected through a collective, organic process than one that was chosen for them and they are expected to run to, shouting 'Hallelujah, I've seen the light!'. An organiser should work to build people's skills and experience in analysis, not control the analysis itself. Organisers should facilitate analysis by making sure that a process of dialogue, where people talk out their feelings and insights about an issue, and research takes place, with ultimately a solid position and strategy being formulated. As sure as the sun will shine, people will at times choose to work for the reforms, which sets off the vanguardist tendency in many radicals. But an organiser knows that it's not the end of the world, and in fact this is quite natural. The best way for someone to learn the futility of reformism is often not by being lectured, but by experiencing it for him or herself in the course of struggle. Radicalisation is rarely a divine revelation; rather reform struggles can often be key elements in the process. Organisers facilitate and encourage the action people have chosen, knowing that any action is useful as long as there is reflection. Truly useful and radical theory develops from such action and reflection, not clever thoughts in an ivory tower. An organiser is ultimately concerned with transforming power dynamics, and this can often be accomplished just as well in working towards a reform as a more radical goal.

It is also important to remember that historically the people have been the most radical element in revolutionary moments. It is the activists, intellectuals, and party leaders, who are always claiming to have the monopoly on militancy and advanced ideas, who end up exerting a conservative influence when it most

matters. A true anarchist and revolutionary organiser wants to develop and unleash the revolutionary potency in people, and when its day has come will let it wash away the old order without straining to put a leash on it in the name of party, ideology, or personal power.

Power Dynamics

Organisers are primarily concerned with transforming power dynamics, but in what way? Currently, much of society is based on an unequal power dynamic of hierarchy and top-down rule. Anarchists and revolutionary organisers should be focused on changing this power dynamic wherever it occurs. Power is not necessarily a bad thing it is simply the ability to effect change and have a say in decision-making. What is bad is when power is distributed unequally, when it is given to some and not to others. But fortunately power, unlike money, does grow on trees, or more precisely is present within each of us as human beings. How power is distributed in society is a social relationship, and like any social relationship, can be transformed once the people involved commit themselves to changing it.

While power is currently concentrated in the hands of a few, organisers' work to change the situation into one in which power is distributed evenly. What this means in concrete terms is that right now only a minority in society get to make the decisions about how society will operate, and also monopolize the means to enforce those decisions. Instead, anarchists wish to see everyone have an equal say in the decisions that affect their communities. Decisions will be made reality by the people themselves, not imposed on them by coercive methods.

Organisers are not only concerned with developing people's power, but also their creativity and initiative. In other words, while all revolutions and movements depend on some degree of popular empowerment, oftentimes this is only so that it can be directed into the channels that leaders and would-be leaders have devised. Anarchist organisers rightly view this as manipulation and inimical to freedom. With equal and collective power for all should come the equal opportunity of all to decide how their power will be exercised.

It should be understood that there are generally two types of power: positive power and negative power. Positive power is the ability to create and construct in terms of freedom, it can be described as the 'freedom to'. Negative power is the ability to restrict someone else's actions or prevent an undesired event from taking place. In terms of freedom, this is known as 'freedom from'. The terms positive and negative do not necessarily connote that one type is desirable and the other is not. True power is the sum of both positive and negative power. The desirability of a form of power can be found in whether it is collectively wielded or monopolised by only a few.

Negative power is the destructive and limiting force. When wielded by the few, it manifests itself as war, prisons, police, bombs, oppression, etc. But as a collective force, which is what revolutionary organisers are concerned with, negative power is the important ability of people to stand up to injustice in the streets, destroy oppressive institutions, and defend their freedom, rights, communities and organisations against encroachment by rulers. Obviously negative power is vital in pursuing a social revolution and radically transforming society, since those in authority and blessed with privilege will not give up their ill-gotten gains without struggle. The most important elements in cultivating negative power are courage, confidence, and willpower. Once the people have resolved upon a course of action and believe in it in their hearts, the power they can wield is without equal. Governments and institutions that seem invincible and eternal have crumbled with breathtaking speed once the masses have made up their mind to destroy them. Given this fact, those in power, by necessity, must convince people through various means (education, the media, etc.) that they are helpless to change anything and powerless in the face of the might of the system. Thus, the most common reason that people give for not participating in political or revolutionary activity is that it is useless and they can't make a difference. In order to cultivate negative power then, this socialisation must be counteracted. By participating in campaigns and actions, people can begin to get a sense of what they can achieve collectively and become habituated to using that power. People must develop the courage to use their power, confidence in its efficacy, and the willingness to use it. While negative power is often heavily or exclusively focused upon, because we are in the midst of a system that we must dismantle and destroy, it is vitally important not to ignore the other type of power.

Positive power is the constructive and creative force. It can be used by the few to create complex systems of exploitation and oppression, such as the global system of neo-liberal capitalism or the million and one laws that only serve to damn us. In the hands of the people, however, positive power can be used to create new institutions to meet the needs and desires of a society based upon a new vision. Such creative work is as vital to revolution as the destructive work of negative power. Obviously the goal is not just to tear down

the current society but also to build a better one in its place. Just as people need to participate in smaller expressions of negative power to build their confidence before they jump into the big leagues, so too are small steps often helpful with positive power. Limited programs of mutual aid to meet community needs, such as breakfast programs, tenant or worker co-operatives, etc., are important ways to build people's confidence in their ability to construct without direction from above, to provide practice in exercising that creativity which has atrophied in the suffocating atmosphere of capitalism and hierarchal society, and to give people a taste of a different world, a taste which will hopefully bloom into a burning thirst. Just as people have been convinced that they can't stand up to the system and make a change, they have also been convinced that this way of life is as good as humanity gets and there is no alternative. We have been bred to believe the worst about each other and humankind in general, and experiments in positive power can show people that co-operation, justice, equality, and solidarity can come as naturally and easily to us as competition, selfishness and brutality to us under the current system. Once confidence, experience, and belief/desire in a better world have been developed, people can wield positive power to move beyond limited programs to the complete collective management of social, political, and economic life.

The aim of organisers is to help develop both the positive and negative power of the people. A revolutionary anarchist organiser does not control people power; rather he or she merely tries to work for situations and structures that develop it. How that power is used is up to the people themselves.

Towards the Social Revolution

Dual power is an important concept for organisers and anarchists to understand. It refers to a state of affairs in which popular power, in both its positive and negative forms, poses a direct challenge to the State and threatens to replace it as the accepted power in society. When free, co-operative institutions are created by the people to take over the political, economic, and/or social organisation of life, the new society is being created within the shell of the old. However, while this positive construction is absolutely integral to revolution, it cannot be successful without tactics based on negative power. The State will not just peacefully relinquish power to the free institutions of the people. Rather, those in power will try their best to destroy them using whatever coercion and force is necessary. This is because institutions of dual power are direct challenges to the legitimacy of the State. A situation where two social forms compete for legitimacy is inherently unstable, one or the other must prevail eventually. Negative power is thus essential to defend the people's institutions against State attacks, as well as to take the offensive and dismantle the State.

Some see social revolution as an outdated concept that is rendered impossible and unrealistic in this modern world of high-tech weaponry and a U.S. military that is the most powerful war-making machine the world has ever known. This, however, demonstrates a lack of understanding as to what social revolution really is. It is not a political revolution where leaders and factions compete for authority or a guerrilla struggle with a small band fighting against Goliath. Rather, it is the people as a whole rising up to create new societal forms and to destroy the old ones. It can be seen as a zero-sum game where an increase in people power leads to a decrease in State and elite power. Once a certain point has been reached, people power is at such a high level that State and elite power is reduced to a weak semblance of its old self. This is because it must always be remembered, and it seems that some have forgot, that the economic, political, and social power of the ruling class is based on controlling and commanding people's power. When people begin to seize control of their own power and use it for their own purposes, not only does this become fuel for the fire of revolution, but it also means that this power is lost to the ruling class and means a reduction in their power. The case for social revolution in modern society is thus not as hopeless as it first seems, for the withdrawal of people's power from the system does more damage to State and capitalist power than any street fighting could ever do. There will of course be some fighting and violence, but the more organised the people are and the more people seize control of their own power, the weaker the ruling class will be without firing a single bullet.

Organising Theory

Organisations at heart are a network of relationships between people. It is important never to forget this, and that organisations are created to serve the needs of people, not vice versa. That being said, organisations are necessary and important. They are the means by which people can wield collective power. Power must be wielded collectively, not only because it is otherwise impossible to achieve social change, but also

because collective power will be the basis of the new society. One key thing must be said, and I cannot stress this enough, the ultimate goal of an organiser is to make everyone into an organiser. One's skills, insights, and knowledge should not be jealously guarded but rather shared as widely as possible.

That being said, what are the main tasks facing an organiser when helping in the construction of an organisation?

1. Build Relationships

Relationships between the people inside them are what make or break effective revolutionary organisations. Ultimately, a network of relationships or collection of people forms the initial foundation of an organisation. Sometimes this group comes together organically on its own, and at other times it is the work of active outreach by organisers. Such outreach can be in the form of one-on-one conversations, group forums, or other means. Oftentimes organisations also come about as the result of a single-issue campaign when a core group of people working on such a campaign come together to create something more broad and lasting.

Whatever the case may be, it is the responsibility of organisers and everyone in an organisation to make sure that all relationships are healthy and based on principles of equality and solidarity. Feelings of camaraderie and co-operation often develop naturally as a result of shared work, but it is also important to create a culture of friendship. This culture can come about if people have fun together and share in social activities that are not necessarily even related to what the organisation does. When new people enter the organisation, the utmost effort must be made to integrate them into the network of relationships, so that cliques of old experienced member's, separate from new members, do not develop. If people are not engaged and feel disconnected from everyone else, they will likely not stay around for long.

2. Organise Relationships into a Structured Form

Structure is vitally important for all organisations. While a good organisation may be made up of people who feel a kinship to each other and even people who are all committed to lofty revolutionary principles, informal hierarchies still can and will develop without structure. It is easy to be turned off to the concept of structure when we live in a society based on authoritarian, hierarchal structures that strangle freedom and participation, and when endless, frustrating bureaucracy is everywhere. But just because structure takes on such vile forms in our current society does not mean we should throw out the baby with the bath water. If used in the right way, structure can actually be a means of insuring democracy and equal power and participation.

The absence of structure and order does not necessarily lead to freedom or equality. Certain members of our society possess privileges based on race, class, gender, or personality. Without any structure, these privileges manifest themselves and an informal, ranked hierarchy based upon them emerges. Those with privilege dominate discussion and decision-making, while those without it feel disenfranchised and intimidated. Democracy is not just about everyone having a vote, but about everyone having an equal part in the discussion leading up to a vote, the information needed to make it, and the opportunity and ability to voice their opinion on the issue. Those who argue against structure ignore the fact that the process upon which structureless groups operate is the organisational equivalent of the theory of laissez-faire capitalism where everyone in capitalism has the opportunity to get rich, so if they don't then it's their own fault. Of course we all know that this is complete nonsense and that success in capitalism is almost always determined by privilege (whether based on class, race, gender, etc.). Similarly, some argue that groups without structure are also level playing fields and that if people do not speak up or participate it is their own fault (personal responsibility).

Anarchists and revolutionaries should know better. The group is collectively responsible for insuring the equal participation of all its members, while personal responsibility is a concept that we should discard, as it has always been the justification for iniquity.

Organisers should help in building a non-hierarchal, democratic structure that defends against the emergence of any type of hierarchy or elite, whether formal or informal. Such a structure should accomplish the following things:

1. Create Accountability

It is vitally important that tasks are formally assigned and divided up. If they are not, tasks will end up falling to the same people over and over again, which is unhealthy because not only will those people end

up monopolising experience and skills, but the work of the organisation ends up being performed by only a few, which is a recipe for elitism. Additionally, assigning tasks has the benefit of creating accountability. If no one is really responsible for a certain task, then there is no way of insuring that it gets done. But if there is someone responsible, then there is a definite sense of accountability which will insure that most things do get done, and at the least that there is someone to question if he or she does not follow through on the assigned task. Accountability is not a trespass against individual freedom. Tasks should be assigned on a volunteer basis, so that one freely chooses to be accountable when taking something on. While individual freedom is a high priority for anarchists, so is the collective responsibility that goes with it. In other words, there is a responsibility to the people that you work with when participating in an organisation. You are fully free to shirk a task, but your comrades are equally free to not trust you with tasks anymore, at least until you can prove otherwise. The person who is accountable does not necessarily have to perform the task alone, but can simply be the point person who makes sure that what they are assigned to do gets done in general.

2. Build Leadership and Empower People

It is important that organisations empower and develop the leadership abilities of each of their members. While anarchists are against permanent leaders with vested authority over others, it is important for us in our organising to acknowledge the fact that leaders and leadership of a different type do exist in organisations and revolutionary movements, and that this is a natural and not necessarily negative phenomena. Leadership is not harmful as long as the right structure is in place to insure that the leadership skills of everyone are developed, and that everyone is a leader at some point and in some capacity. When everyone is a leader, has power, and is an agent of change, then anarchism is realized. Part of an organiser's work in changing power dynamics is to change them within the organisation, by making sure a structure is in place that insures power is equally distributed, and that those with privilege, be it based on gender, race, class, education, or experience do not hold an unfair advantage in shaping theory, leadership, decision-making, and/or importance. If an organiser achieves nothing else besides empowering people, then he or she has done a lot. Power is something that everyone has, it just needs to be tapped and drawn out.

3. Move towards Collective Action

Ultimately an organisation must act. It is no use having empowered people or a great structure if people's power is not used to make things happen and create change. There is a reason that the word movement is used after all, because it is based on action. It is also important to remember that the process of empowerment and radicalisation is primarily driven by personal and collective experience in action (and reflection upon it afterwards).

The three steps I have outlined are not really steps at all, but rather three components of a complementary and simultaneous process. Action is made up of strategy and tactics. Strategy is in essence the overall plan of action to accomplish a larger goal. A campaign, itself with its own strategy, might be part of a larger strategy (towards revolution for example). Tactics are the individual actions that make up a strategy.

The role of an organiser is to facilitate whatever course of action or campaign people have decided upon. He or she does this by sharing whatever experiences or skills might be helpful, by asking the right questions that will get people to think in constructive and positive ways (i.e. getting people to think strategically, encouraging creativity and thoughtful choice of tactics, etc.), and making sure that tasks are co-ordinated and followed through with. The test of a group's structure comes through action, and its weaknesses will often only be revealed at this time. An organiser should always be assessing what is going wrong or right and bringing these observations up to the group for discussion and possible solutions. An organisation's structure should always be seen as a work in progress and never beyond question. It is important to be fluid enough to adapt to changing conditions and situations as well as to compensate for unforeseen flaws.

While organisers should be a motivating force in an organisation, true motivation for action can only come from within each person. Passion can definitely be a collective process, however, in that people undoubtedly inspire each other. Enthusiasm is often contagious. That being said, one of the key roles for organisers comes after action when they should be encouraging analysis and assessment, for action without reflection is fruitless. Just as people grow from lessons learned from experience, organisations and movements become more effective and powerful only by assessing past actions and shaping future tactics and strategy based upon such reflection. It is also important that such lessons are institutionalised or made permanent in some way so that people don't have to keep reinventing the wheel. This is why solid organisations are necessary that don't just evaporate after a time, because we need to be launching from a higher and higher point of

experience and awareness each time we act. If lessons are lost when a movement dissipates, then the next generation has to start from the bottom of the ladder once again. This is one of the reasons why a social revolution has yet to be achieved.

Unconscious and Conscious Rebellion

Anarchists maintain that the current system we live under is irrational, unnatural, and deeply anti-human. Contrary to what many think, the tendency of humanity is actually towards co-operation, freedom, and creativity (in other words, anarchism), so that the social environment we must survive in goes against our natural instincts and inclinations. Given such a context, it is common for people to manifest unconscious feelings of rebellion towards everyday situations that go against their dignity and humanity. To put it in another way, no one feels comfortable being a slave because it is an inhuman condition. Acts of absenteeism, sabotage, or slowing down on the job are unconscious acts of rebellion against the conditions of work under capitalism. Often, people may be nationalistic or conservative on a conscious level, yet possess unconscious subversive instincts just by virtue of being human. People can only be persuaded to go against their own best interests (which is the purpose of the propaganda of those in power) to a certain point and a certain depth of consciousness.

This concept is an important one for organisers to be aware of and fully understand because it should be central to organising strategy. It is all too common for those wanting change, especially isolated activists, to develop a view of ordinary people as ignorant, reactionary masses who are the problem. This view is problematic for two reasons. One, because it establishes a false division in our minds between activists or revolutionaries and the people. The people are not some abstract mass over there, we are the people. The fact that this way of thinking has become so prevalent demonstrates the isolation that the activist approach has created and its inherent elitism. Secondly, this view ignores the fact that everyone is a potential revolutionary because, as I mentioned, we all unconsciously chafe against this system, from messing up at work to vague hatred of the police to complaints about corporate omnipresence. The process of organising is thus the process of tapping this unconscious rebellion in people, bringing it out into the open, and helping them to fashion it into a conscious awareness. This can effectively be done using the processes I have mentioned on action and reflection, asking the right questions to transform the unconscious into the conscious, etc.

Working in Reform Movements

Though it may seem distasteful and pointless to anarchists, it is often necessary and important for revolutionary organisers to work within reform movements. This serves four purposes: to build skills, work directly with the oppressed, to understand radicalisation, and to be transformed as one transforms others. The fact is that most people, especially anarchists unfortunately, don't have much experience in organising. Participating in reform movements is a good way to build up solid organising skills. Experience is the best teacher, and simply reading about organising is often a poor substitute (which is not to say that one should not read or that skills cannot be shared, they certainly must and should be, but direct experience should not be ignored). The other reality is that most movements consisting of oppressed people will be generally reformist, especially organisations that people join when first becoming conscious or deciding to take action. This is largely because anarchists and other revolutionaries have declined to participate in movements of oppressed people, as organisers or even as participants. Abdicating this role has left the stage clear for reformists to run the show and monopolise the attention of oppressed people. Anarchists must work directly with the oppressed if we are serious about having any part in a social revolution and contributing to it. And to work directly with the oppressed, we must often work in reform movements. This is not wasted effort on our part despite what we may think of the goals of a movement, because it is vital for an organiser to understand the process of radicalisation, and the best school may be in such a movement. It is important for organisers to understand the different ways in which people are radicalised, and how this knowledge can be used to help radicalise others.

Finally, while activists, organisers, and revolutionaries often have a sense of unjustified superiority and ego due to being part of the few who have advanced ideas, working in reform movements may help bring one down to size. Organisers must always be open and receptive to learning from others. We must never assume that just because we are revolutionary and others are reformist or ordinary that they have nothing

to teach us. Hopefully, an organiser will be transformed as he or she helps to transform others. In other words, revolutionary organising is not a one-way process but rather an interchange and back and forth of knowledge, experience, ideas, and skills. Despite being useful and important, this process is also necessary to break down any barriers between an organiser and those he or she is working with, though it should be said that the best organiser is one who is already rooted in the struggle he or she is engaged in. Forming revolutionary movements is of course necessary at some point, but such a movement would highly benefit from organisers with skills and experience built up in other, more reformist movements.

Movement of Anarchists or Anarchistic Movement?

Anarchism developed out of the struggles of people for justice, equality, freedom, and community, not as an armchair ideology. It is thus sad to see how much of what passes for anarchist theory and action today is divorced from ordinary people, their movements, and their everyday lives. For those who embrace anarchism as an intellectual game or hobby, they are quite free to pass their lives scribbling away into eternity. But for those who want to see a new society brought about, it is time to get back to the roots, back to the struggle. We cannot impose our ideas on others without violating the spirit of anarchism. But that is not the goal of organising, nor is it to manipulate or subvert people. It is not possible or necessary to convert every person into a conscious anarchist, and then launch a movement and revolution from that point. Rather, we should be working together with others to build a movement that is anarchistic in orientation, strategy, and goals. If such a movement can be built, it matters little whether people call themselves anarchists or not.

* Much debt is owed to James Mumm's article, *Active Revolution*, and to my comrades in Students For Justice.

Ian Martin is a broke student/wage slave, a member of Students For Justice, a Wobbly and a cool Panamenian dude.
Barcelona F.C. forever!!!

From Reform to Revolution

Ian Martin

'Reformist!' What a dreaded word for any self-professed revolutionary to be attached to. It is one of those accusatory labels that ends intelligent debate and is designed to intimidate one into silence. Much like the labels of communist! or, more recently, terrorist! used by those in power and their propagandists. These labels serve as ideological whips to force someone into the proper mindset; god forbid someone does not spout the proper theories or rhetoric. It is amazing how much activity is considered reformist by some, leaving one to wonder exactly what can be done that is considered revolutionary besides running around with gun and bomb in hand, attending meetings with the necessary scowl, or dancing around a campfire. Reformist vs. revolutionary. The eternal debate. And while we stand around fighting over which actions are which, we accomplish no action, and the world goes to hell.

The Zapatistas, while enjoying support from many people throughout the world, have also met with criticism. When coming from the radical community, this criticism most often takes the form of, you guessed it, accusations of reformism. What is the basis for these accusations? Well, some do not like the fact that the Zapatistas did not try to march on Mexico City after their initial revolt, and that they have not tried to take power. In fact, they state very plainly that they have no intention of doing so. As for a march on Mexico City, I would very much like to see those who propose this course of action lead it. The Mexican Army out-

numbers and outguns the Zapatista forces, not to mention that it has the full support of the United States. American officials have routinely intervened to stop insurrections in the farthest reaches of the globe, so it is safe to say that one in the U.S.'s southern neighbour would engender the harshest response possible. This is not to say that revolution is impossible in Mexico, but some practicality is necessary. A Zapatista march on Mexico City in 1994 would have been suicide, and it is unsettling to see certain individuals so willing to throw away lives, especially one's not their own. As for not wanting to take power, this is a philosophy and mindset to be commended, not derided. To be unwilling to seize power and impose one's ways on others is a trait that was sorely lacking in certain other revolutions in the twentieth century.

Criticism from anarchists, however, is most often directed at the Zapatistas because of their simple demands for food, housing, education, health care, land, democracy, liberty, and autonomy. It may be easy for middle class rebels to haughtily shrug off these things as reforms to be mocked, but to the indigenous peoples of Chiapas, and many others throughout the Global South, these demands are anything but simple. In many cases, the situation is dire, and these reforms may be the difference between survival and destruction, either literally or figuratively. It's pretty hard to have a revolution if there is no one to revolt anymore! Sure, they are reforms in the sense that they are demands made to a government, and do not fundamentally change the economic or political system of Mexico, but they will fundamentally change the situation of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas. And who can doubt that the Zapatistas reformist struggle has radicalised many in Mexico, and provided them with the inspiration to make their own stand against those in power?

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defence, formed in the 1960's, was also criticized and continues to be criticized to this day as reformist for some of the same reasons as the Zapatistas. The BPP's Ten Point Program was indeed a, simple statement of desired reforms to strive towards. But again, the situation of African-Americans then (and now) was extreme, with extraordinary levels of violence, police brutality, infant mortality, poor health, and poverty common. As the Black Panthers conceived it, the Ten Point Program was a program for survival, to keep the community alive long enough to form some kind of revolutionary movement. Perhaps some may scoff at demands such as affordable housing that is not squalid, crowded, decaying, and in horrible condition, or not having to be at the whim of capricious, uncaring, and greedy landlords, but to the poor, these things are essential. It is difficult for any human being to pay attention to and fight against relatively nebulous concepts like militarism and the State when they are forced to fight concretely for the very necessities of life everyday.

I do not defend the Black Panthers with blinders on to their Marxist-Leninist leanings and hierarchal structure, nor by defending the Zapatistas do I necessarily agree with every single aspect of what they do or who they are. But that is not the issue. The issue is that people seem to have a misunderstanding of what reformism actually is, to the point where they fail to see that reforms, or more accurately the process of fighting for reforms, are a necessary step toward social revolution. The transformation of anarchism into a counter-culture has led to a counter-culture mentality, where anarchists worry more about the lifestyle of rebellion and the appearance of rebellion than actually working towards it in any concrete fashion. Anarchists can spout off until the end of time about the social revolution, but without serious discussion and implementation of a strategy to get there, we are nothing more than a joke. It's as simple as this: we are here at point A, the society we want is at point B, what steps do we need to take to get there? Despite how elementary this question is, it is the most neglected in the anarchist discussions of today, at least in the way of any concrete, serious answers to it. Therefore, this article is my attempt to bring the question to the forefront, and explain why reforms should form an integral part of our revolutionary strategy.

Reforms are vitally important for a whole host of reasons. One is just to help people in need survive and have a better life in the present. Both the BPP and Zapatistas, as I mentioned, adhered to this idea and advanced survival programs. While many believe that this is actually an indictment of reforms because it takes the edge off revolutionary anger, not only is this a callous and classist argument, often coming from middle-class radicals who do not have to experience this deprivation, but it betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the causes of revolution. Revolutions do not spring from despair or deep deprivation, they actually occur when expectations are rising, there is a belief in a better world, and this belief chafes against the reality of government as a hindrance.

Another necessity if revolution is to occur is that people must be freed from having to fight daily battles for simple things, so that they can then become interested in and join bigger ones. Reforms are useful for this purpose, such as the 4-hour day advocated by the IWW. Reforms are also necessary to impart, for lack of a better phrase, 'revolutionary consciousness' in a community. Many oppressed groups probably feel a bit irritated and annoyed that radicals spend so much time on certain subjects and so little time on others, like fighting for people of colour and the poor, in a concrete way. It is one thing to spout off the necessary rhetoric about fighting for the oppressed masses, but it is quite another to join them in the battle for rent controls, an end to police brutality, decent housing, and the establishment of social programs. By fighting

with them, one can not only demonstrate that radical philosophies do pertain to issues that concern them, but also can explain how they do so, so that these reforms do not end as merely reforms, but become stepping stones to bigger and bigger battles. Now, this is not to imply any kind of vanguardist attempt by radicals to come into a community and educate the ignorant population. Notice I said join the battle, not lead the battle. But a presence is necessary to establish contacts with communities, and solidify those connections over time. These kinds of attempts at outreach have been ignored for far too long, when they are the real meat and bones of any attempt at a revolutionary movement.

Many seem to act under the assumption that a population can go from zero to revolutionary in a day. This does not and will not happen. It especially will not happen if we go on having protests, meetings, groups, and political discussions and expect people to come to us. We have to go to them. We must not force our priorities and pet battles onto them (though we can certainly mention them), but instead must fight for the things that are important and vital to them, even if they are reforms. Our purpose will be to use these battles to show them their own power. Many do not even believe that they can win a fight against their landlord, let alone capitalism, the military, and the entire state machinery of the United States of America! But if they can start winning these smaller skirmishes, then a sense of their own power and ability to effect change will take hold and ferment. However, as mentioned before, there has to be the constant reminder and push to make sure that reforms, once gained, never satisfy. Reforms can be problematic, and though I have been hard on those who speak out against reformism, I can sympathize with where their viewpoint comes from. Oftentimes, once a movement or group has won a reform, they are content and go back to their regular lives. Indeed, governments and institutions grant reforms for this purpose to pacify. And this is exactly why we have to be part of movements fighting for reforms. To build a revolutionary presence in communities and movements striving towards reforms is the beginning of radicalising those communities and movements, and placing those reforms in the proper context. Some scoff at the idea of trying to work within reformist struggles, and proclaim that the only way to achieve change is from the outside, by creating revolutionary organisations. But there is a necessary news-flash for all the vast majority of the population will not join revolutionary organisations and does not have a revolutionary mindset. It is absolutely absurd to expect them to make the effort, as I said, to come seek out these organisations, when they are busy with their own struggles. Not to say that revolutionary groups do not have a place, they most definitely do, but it is time to go where the fight is.

The ghettoisation of anarchism and radical politics has by this point been lamented by many, and for good reason. Relationship with communities is what makes or breaks a movement for change. It is an irony that a revolution based on anarchism is the type that needs the broadest support by the most amount of people (otherwise it would be a vanguard group coercing the rest of the population to follow their way and therefore not anarchist), yet some (not all) of its adherents seem to abhor the idea of associating with regular people and rarely make attempts to establish a presence in anywhere but their own circles. There is a woeful lack of outreach. A lot of this has to do with not wanting to be reformist well let me put those fears to rest. Fighting for reforms is not inherently reformist, and is indeed the basis and springboard for revolution. If nothing else, fighting with others for needed reforms can inspire sympathy. Say, Anarchist A fights with a community against the demolishing of housing to make way for condominiums. From now on, even if Person A from that community hears bad things in the media about anarchists, maybe now he or she will say, 'You know, I don't think that's true, Anarchist A was a good person and fought with us.' The media and government paint anarchists and radicals as irrational fanatics, basically inhuman and unnatural, which makes it easy to suppress us without public outcry. We only make this more effective by remaining aloof and being abnormal in most people's eyes, but we can dispel this misconception by simply being around. Ideally, the reforms we fight for should actually be independent institutions outside the State that meet a community's needs. While supposedly fighting for reforms, in this case the community would actually be establishing self-sufficiency and embarking on the road to the transformation of society. In working with communities, not only is our goal to demonstrate to people their own power, but also to give them a taste of the society that could be built with that power. There is a wrong-headed notion going around that people are clueless about the ills of society and we need to just bombard them with enough logic and facts until they see the light. Instead of focusing so much time on illustrating the various problems, which many people know about already, we should be focusing on convincing people that an alternative is possible and that they have the strength to make it a reality. Most people are attached to the current system more out of a lack of faith in the possibility of an alternative than any love for it. The key to revolutionary consciousness is sparking that fire in people's hearts that makes them believe in a new society, want it with all their soul, and feel that it is within their power. Unfortunately, even in left and anarchist circles, there dominates the Western fetish of logic and rationality. We need people who believe in revolution with their hearts and not just with their heads, and in fact, that's the only way in which we can truly reach them.

The final point is just to say that there is a current in anarchism that views anarchists as some sort of enlightened, elite group separate from everyone else. But the fact is that the people are not out there somewhere, we are the people. Many anarchists have class and skin privilege and quite rightly assert that attempts by them to enter a community made up of people of colour would be ineffective to say the least and likely resented. But this is not an excuse for inaction or maintaining the insulated cult of anarchism. There is much work that anyone can do, it's just a matter of seeing where one fits into the struggle. There should be no place in anarchism for those who despise the masses as cattle.

Huey P. Newton said that revolution is a process, not a conclusion, and I agree wholeheartedly with that statement. What it means is that revolution is happening everyday, and we can fight for it everyday. Fighting for reforms is not preparing for a future revolution tomorrow; it is fighting the revolution now. We must stress effective actions that accomplish concrete objectives instead of miring ourselves in alienating ideological debates, symbolic guilt-assuaging protests, or choosing battles that accomplish little in furthering the transformation of society. Revolution is not a course of study where one must read the proper textbooks, it is not the basis for a new elitism and hierarchy of more and less revolutionary individuals, it is the cry of the human spirit for freedom and justice whose language is passion and action.

Reforms Part II - Anti-Electoralism

My first essay was an attempt to explain why it is integral to an anarchist revolutionary strategy for anarchists to work in broad-based reform movements. This follow-up to that essay will further flesh out my argument in a more specific way, and also explain what might seem like a contradiction in my thinking when I advocate a position of anti-electoralism.

Anarchists should work in reform movements because that is where the battle for the people's hearts and minds is and will be waged. Unfortunately, by abstaining from participation in such organisations and movements, anarchists have unwittingly allowed reformist and sell-out elements to monopolise power in communities and be the only voices that people hear. Anarchists should be present to argue against and counter the reformist elements in movements, which will clearly demonstrate the existence and legitimacy of revolutionary alternatives to reformism, as well as push the movement on so that concessions do not pacify and a revolutionary agenda is placed on the table. I do not mean to imply that anarchists should take over these organisations, but rather that they should provide people with a choice. Those who argue against anarchist participation in reform movements because such participation for some inexplicable reason would inevitably result in an anarchist takeover of such movements, ignore the fact that movements have already been taken over, albeit by reformist elements. The fact is that removing our voice from these movements is to remove our voice and message from the people in general. People will not just come to revolutionary organisations; rather, our presence in reform movements can serve as a bridge/conduit between revolutionary organisations and the people. In addition, reform movements in the right situation can and have been pushed into being revolutionary movements in their own right, and our presence can serve to increase the likelihood of this occurring.

Given my arguments, many might think it contradictory that I espouse the traditional anarchist policy of anti-electoralism. Surely a progressive anti-Bush campaign or Green campaign can be used in the same manner as a reform movement such as tenant's rights, can't it? Well, no. For one thing, the goal of electoral campaigns promotes the belief that the problem is in certain leaders, not in hierarchal authority itself, and thus legitimises what anarchism is fundamentally against. While a movement pushing for rent controls, for example, can be said to be promoting false notions as well, namely that we should look to government to protect and provide for us, anarchists in the movement can push for an understanding that sees the movement's goal as the extraction of demands from an enemy (until self-sufficiency is attained), not as asking gifts from government. It is important to remember that the process of fighting for reforms is more valuable than the actual reforms themselves. The fight for reforms gives people a sense of their own power to transform society, imparts dignity, and fosters the development of a revolutionary counter-culture (as opposed to a music-based counter-culture such as punk). Through the battles they fight and their participation in organisations that are structured in empowering ways based on equality, justice, freedom, and co-operation (if anarchists are present in organisations to push for this type of structure), people can get a taste of the future society and thus begin to believe in and deeply desire an alternative. It is important when anarchists participate in reform movements to push for direct action and more militant tactics, when appropriate of course, so that people power is built and not the power of movement leaders and government/co-opted institutions. Though some may think that I am advocating the abandonment of anarchist principles and a

reckless immersion into reformism, this couldn't be more false. What I am actually proposing, as can be seen, is a careful, tactical participation of anarchists in reform movements, where we judge our actions and fashion the agendas we push for based on what will advance the cause of freedom, equality, and justice, and what will build people power.

So why doesn't participation in electoral campaigns work? One reason, to put it in crass, capitalist terms of cost efficiency is that for the amount of time, money, and energy put into political campaigns, little if any gain in people power is made and social transformation is brought no closer (especially since electoral campaigns are a win-lose, all or nothing proposition). Progressive politicians, even if elected, can be a hindrance to the furtherance of revolution. People may come to depend on the granting of reforms from above, and cease the building up of alternative community institutions from below. The amount or intensity of the fight for reforms may be less than during the reign of a conservative administration, which is harmful because the fight is what is productive. This is not always true, though, as strikes, demands, and militancy have often increased under progressive governments because people become frustrated by the lack of response from officials supposedly on their side. This too can be constructive and instructive. So often the outcome of an electoral campaign is not what is important, rather what we make of that outcome is, since both conservative and progressive administrations can be made to serve as important lessons. Ideally, we should pursue our revolutionary strategy with a single-minded intensity that seems to put little stock in the outcome of elections. It is undoubtedly confusing if anarchists constantly claim that the problem is authority itself and all politicians are pretty much the same, yet during election time we push for a certain politician or party! The final point against participation in electoral campaigns is that even if progressive politicians gain power, their ability to effect reforms is limited by the structure of the capitalist system itself, especially in this era of neo-liberalism. Even if a politician wants to do some good, he or she is forced to work within the confines of the system and the realities of power and wealth that dominate it. I actually do call for anarchist participation in the field of electoralism, but as an active voice for anti-electoralism. Unfortunately, anarchists have been content to abstain from the political arena completely instead of using the opportunity to explain and articulate an anti-electoralist position to the wider population. Most people in this country are amenable to our arguments to some degree as can be seen by the lack of voter turnout, yet we have largely forfeited this opening through which we can provide a context and justification for people's ambiguous feelings of disillusionment and advance the idea that there are possibilities beyond voting. Such possibilities of social and political participation beyond voting are omitted and smothered by those in power to insure adherence to safe channels of electoral politics. In a way, my approach to electoral politics is similar to my approach to reformist movements, in that in both cases I advocate the presence of anarchists on the main roads of political participation so that our voice can be heard. Presence does not necessarily mean that we are headed where these main roads lead to, but rather that we are around to inform people of the existence of alternative paths. Staying on our back roads and surrendering our voice in everyday life will insure our irrelevance. When it comes to electoral politics, our presence should be as an anti-electoralist voice. This is a more productive course than participating in progressive electoral campaigns.

The goal, ideally, should be to implement a process of community liberation, which would entail the build up of independent, non-hierarchical programs/institutions to meet all of the community's needs and establish self-sufficiency and autonomy from the State. Of course self-sufficiency should not mean isolation, and federation of such liberated communities would be both necessary and desirable for defence, mutual aid, and co-operation. Yet anarchists cannot move into a community and set up these institutions and get the ball rolling tomorrow, at least not completely. This is why participation in reform movements is necessary, so that such a revolutionary program and orientation can enter the discourse and people can ultimately choose to pursue it if they so desire. Right now, that choice is absent.

The course and strategy I advocate is not easy, and I am not blind to the difficulties. Many reform movements are highly hierarchical with reformism deeply ingrained. Many also are willing to resort to underhanded and repressive measures to stifle radical voices, which we obviously would be. Yet the difficulty of a proposition should not necessarily be the determining factor in whether anarchists should pursue it or not. Whoever said that achieving social revolution was easy? Whoever said that anarchists should run from difficulty? Following the path of least resistance is not usually the best choice. There is a reason why a path has little resistance, and almost always it's because that path doesn't lead to real change. It's time to step up to the plate and turn words into deeds. We cannot sit back and trust with religious intensity that the revolution will make itself or that the State, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy will kindly disappear themselves.

Ian Martin is a broke student/wage slave, a member of Students For Justice, a Wobbly and a cool Panamenian dude.
Barcelona F.C. forever!!!

The Intersections of Anarchism and Community Organising

by Dave

**Sabate Anarchist Collective
(NEFAC-Boston)**

Historically, revolutionary movements have been guided by revolutionary strategy and tactics. A successful dual power movement does not spontaneously arise; it needs consistent organising within an anarchist-communist framework. If we want to be actively involved in pushing society towards a revolutionary consciousness, we need to move outside our usual circles; we need to stop the cycle of activists only talking to activists. To step away from this paradigm is a change in tactics; a change which is sorely needed. After being an activist for years I decided to become a community organiser and with that experience I gained new insights in revolutionary strategy: Anarchists can learn a lot from community organising models in radicalising neighbourhoods and families.

During my experience of organising I successfully facilitated a tenant-buy out of a 48 unit Section 8 property and the creation of a worker-owned landscaping company. This experience has changed my perceptions of the direction of the anarchist movement, its tactics and goals.

Organising in primarily non-white and poor neighbourhoods around issues of affordable housing and living wage jobs gave me new insights in strategy, which differed from my previous activist experience. One of the lessons I learned was how to begin changing relations of power and radicalising people, through pro-active campaigns around community identified issues. Through the process I felt that both community organising projects and the anarchist movement could learn from each other so that we can begin to build a dual power movement strong enough to topple capitalism and rooted deep enough in actual communities to begin creating a new society.

I learned many hands-on skills of organising, such as building an organisation, running campaigns, running meetings, doing turn-out and polarizing targets. Through learning many aspects of organising, a contradiction arose with my work and my politics; I was organising without specific radical means and ends which lead down a one way street to reformism. Simultaneously, I was able to build power in non-white and working class neighbourhoods and for the first time I also felt I had an impact on changing socio-economic conditions in people's lives. The contradiction has led me to both critique the absence of explicitly anarchist politics within community organising, as well as the lack of a solid organising strategy by anarchists to effectively radicalise the working class and change socio-economic conditions created by capitalism, patriarchy and whiteness.

Before analysing the connections and differences between my organising work and the anarchist movement, a background of the organisation I worked for is needed. Its mission statement is to organise and empower low-income families in order to build political and economic power, achieve resident control of affordable housing, and to create a permanent regional organisation working for change. It is left-leaning and has a very strong direct action culture. Unlike many other community organising projects, it blends institutional based organising, traditionally seen amongst already established and mostly middle class institutions such as churches, and neighbourhood organising, traditionally based in a specific neighbourhood as opposed to an institution. It strives to create new institutions controlled by low-income families who are directly affected by such an institution. For instance, it originally focused on tenant buy-outs of at risk Section 8 housing complexes, which it successfully converted to co-operative ownership of over 1,100 units, to a worker owned landscaping company servicing those properties. Each new institution pays dues in order to continue organising the already established institutions and to develop, create and organise new institutions.

The organisation is the leadership; it is not the paid staff. The board of directors is made up of low-income people who participate and make the decisions in the organising campaigns. These board members decide everything from the organisation's direction to the organising staff's income. Any day-to-day decisions about campaigns are made by the leadership and are carried out collectively by the organiser of the cam-

paign and the leadership. Within that structure the director acts as a mentor to the organising staff and guide to the campaigns as well.

The organisation's major success is that it built a strong direct action-oriented organising structure that builds new economic institutions controlled by white and non-white poor families. The organisation is successful at building a cross-race working class organisation because of how it develops its campaigns, what issues it organises around, the social class it focuses on, the solutions to the issues it organises, the institutional structure it has produced and its focus on leadership development, participation and ownership of the organisation.

Campaigns around issues such as maintaining affordable housing, tenant ownership, and living wage jobs, directly affect poor families. These campaigns are not based on advocacy, raising awareness, or morality, rather they are based on changing the relations of power, building non-capitalist economic institutions controlled by poor people and making real changes in the socio-economic conditions of those who participate. By focusing the goals of campaigns in a realistic and winnable framework, the organisation is able to consistently bring people out to actions and meetings. The tangible results for the participants, the ownership over the process and the active role they play in meetings, negotiations, and direct actions keeps people active.

Since the campaigns are not based in one locality and are not strictly lead by one social group, the organisation has developed into a working class lead organising project, which is immigrant, Latino, African-American and white. The membership's decision-making power over the direction of specific campaigns and the organisation as a whole are conscious acts by the organising staff; this produces a bottom-up structure empowering working class families as opposed to the organisers themselves.

As an organiser, it was clear that I had to both find people who would add something positive to a campaign and push those interested to get involved. I focused on those who would benefit the campaign and, therefore, the organisation. I looked for people who had influence in their communities, are articulate, are politically developed, are angry and want to see change, and countless other skills and traits that help with an organising campaign. Organising is about building political relationships and trust. I focused my energy on building trust and political relationships with individuals I identified as being beneficial to a campaign and the organisation. To keep people involved I had to not only push them to be active, but also create an environment where their issues were the campaign's focus.

Similar to any successful community organisation, it did not build itself by the organising staff telling families what to do. Rather, it was built by the members actively changing the conditions around them, while the organising staff helped to provide a framework, specialized knowledge, and time to facilitate the process.

One question that everyone asks me when I tell them about my experience as an organiser in poor and primarily non-white neighbourhoods is did I live there, and, "how can you (as a privileged white male) go into a poor non-white community and tell them what to do; doesn't that make you uncomfortable and aren't you asserting your privilege in non-privileged spaces?"

Organising is not about telling people what to do, nor should organisers go into a community with solutions to problems one identifies as an outsider. Community organising is a bottom-up process that focuses on solutions to issues established by people who live in the community. One does not have to live in the same place as one organises, nor does one have to fill the exact same social categories as those you are organising with (though it definitely would help). The strength of any organising drive is the potency of the political relationships its participants have with each other and how those relationships move the participants toward challenging relations of power.

Being privileged by whiteness and class, affects my consciousness, my social relationships, and my effectiveness in working with non-white poor families, but it does not prevent me from actively building powerful revolutionary relationships with oppressed groups, especially relationships that are defined by the oppressed and based on changing the conditions of their oppression. My organising work not only focused on the issues the members wanted, but it also built institutions to combat those issues, therefore, guaranteeing a strong working class lead organisation for the future.

To build a strong organisation with low-income and non-white members one must organise around winnable issues relating to class. It seems simple; but all too often, radical and anarchist organisations fail miserably in this regard. How many political groups have white people been involved in which do not take a conscious step outside of our own white activist communities to build actual relationships with individuals and organisations of oppressed groups?

When talking about class, organise around class issues. This does not mean having teach-ins, passing out flyers, and waiting for the proletariat to show up with a blank slate, and consume every radical word and use it as fuel to end the economic domination of the working class. What it does mean is listening to the working class, as opposed to simply reading about them, by going door to door and talking with working

class people. Be specific, research locations in your local city or town, and go to areas, which are being gentrified, housing is being lost, or jobs are leaving. Find out what the community needs and wants and organise around it. Don't tell the community what is best; instead, use your energy and political experience to actually create class resistance.

Even though the organisation I worked for is successful at building strong non-capitalist economic institutions and developing winnable campaigns based around issues of class, it still remains a reformist organisation because it lacks a coherent and institutionalised body of radical politics, such as anarchist-communism. Just like the majority of community organisations, the goals of the organisation are not outright anarchistic nor revolutionary. Most community organisations do not explicitly organise their members in a revolutionary framework or discourse. The lack of a coherent and institutionalised critique of capitalism and the intersections of race and gender within class prevents them from moving toward creating long-lasting revolutionary social change, which ultimately negates the effect it could have on power dynamics in society. The absence of such a critique and strategy also prevents the leadership from developing more radical politics, thereby creating a dependence on the organiser for political insight. Without an explicit radical or more specifically, an anarchist-communist praxis, the purpose of the organisation, the campaigns as well as the solutions to the issues in the campaigns remain limited to reformist ends.

Anarchist-communism provides a theoretical body of politics and historical tradition to guide such organisations to revolutionary goals and projects. Anarchism is much more suited for today's community organisations because they both emphasise decentralised political action, direct democracy, rank-and-file decision-making power and community input in situations that affect the community. In addition, the anarchist-communist body of politics would help enrich any political understanding of class-based organising; it would open up a revolutionary perspective and infuse revolutionary goals and aims by its members, thereby, transforming any reformist campaign into a small step for a new society and economy.

The focus on reformist goals ensures that any actions and successes act as merely a band-aid covering the wounds caused by capitalism. Though the building blocks for a vibrant dual power struggle are in place, the lack of revolutionary thought cripples the organisation and its possible impact in creating long-term, permanent socio-economic change. Just like many other community organisations it does not have a revolutionary political platform, nor a specific body of politics. This creates flexibility to the organisation in getting state and federal funding and grants; it also allowed the organisation to gain from electoral politics.

At the same time, by not having an anarchistic theoretical framework, the organisation became and still is a breeding ground for reformist practices, which virtually decapitates any revolutionary potential the organisation has. Instead, a campaign victory reaffirms the status quo by allowing those participating to think that they can succeed under capitalism and state, rather than infusing the idea that both determine the conditions of existence for oppression, poverty, hunger, homelessness and class exploitation.

Any strong community organisation or union has its own culture; and any radical one, has built into its culture, radical politics. This can be done in a variety of ways; one way is to build critiques of capitalism into one's campaign for affordable housing even if the goals of the campaign are currently reformist. The institutionalisation of radical politics into the organising work will produce radical members. As an organiser I was the only connection to political action for many families. This action brought class to the forefront of their political activity, but as the organiser I did not bring it in an open and explicit way, pushing those I was organising into a more radical position. Looking back I realized how simple it is to infuse such a body politic within a campaign without pushing potential members away.

Though the anarchist movement (especially the communist strains) in the United States has a revolutionary tradition based around working class organising in local communities, it remains today stagnant and unfortunately far removed from a strong working class movement or even working class identity. Through my experiences in organising and developing relationships with poor families, both white and non-white, it is clear to me that in order to move the anarchist movement to a fundamentally working class nature, we need to step outside our usual tactics, communities and goals. We need to stop acting in a reactionary format. Anarchists need to think of themselves more as organisers than as activists. Organiser's work with specific individuals and groups based in specific locations around issues important to those one is organising; it is a radicalising process based on changing the relations of power by building a movement. An activist tends to work on a number of issues without any community interaction, no dual power framework, more focused on agitation and demonstrations often leading to reactionary actions which exist outside of a strategic campaign for social change.

Anarchists can learn lessons in organising from community organising projects. The most basic lesson is to stop ignoring these "reformist" organisations and to take the time to learn from them anything we possibly can. As anarchists we do not want to build an organisation without working class members. We ultimately want to build a revolutionary class movement powerful enough to send the bourgeoisie into extinction. A

difficult step to such a problem is radicalising the working class: understanding class-consciousness and acting as a solid front against capital and class exploitation. This work must be explicitly anarchist, and those participating must also be theoretically conscious.

The organisation's focus on issues and solutions developed by poor people reinforces its commitment on being controlled and directed by the rank and file who is made up of an oppressed class. By building institutions controlled by those affected by it and by constantly fertilizing a confrontational direct action culture within campaigns creates serious dual power possibilities, yet to be seen in the current anarchist movement. It seems simple: to build a revolutionary anarchist movement we should begin to build actual political relationships with the working class.

To gain working class respect we must facilitate their economic liberation through the participation of the working class. The work is not easy and it is not always flashy, but it's the only way anarchists can bring anarchism into the living room of the working class: by door knocking and workplace organising we can help to change conditions in their neighbourhoods, their jobs and their lives.

Just as this organisation and other community organisations start small, so must we. We must start with small campaigns that we know are winnable, will radicalise the participants, are related to class struggle, will build an organisation and can lead to a revolutionary campaign further down the road. A movement starts with people; organising is not more complicated than radicalising individuals so that they work collectively to change the power relations within society. As anarchists we need to revisit our revolutionary strategy and incorporate a stronger emphasis on organising and movement building so that we can simultaneously destroy capitalism and create communal control of society.

By Dave, Sabate Anarchist Collective (NEFAC-Boston)
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