

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

They followed almost inexorably from the fact that every organisation (however revolutionary its rhetoric and however well-intentioned its goals) which models itself structurally on the very system it seeks to overthrow becomes assimilated and subverted by bourgeois relations. Its seeming effectiveness becomes the source of its greatest failures.

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

No serious anarchist will disagree with Huey’s plea on the “necessity for wiping out the imperialist structure by organised groups.” If at all possible we must work together. We must recognize too, that in the United States, the heartland of world imperialism today, an economy and technology has been developed which could remove, almost overnight, all the problems that Marx once believed justified the need for a state. It

would be a disastrous error to deal with an economy of potential abundance and cybernated production from a theoretical position which was still rooted in a technological era based on coal, crude machines, long hours of toil, and material scarcity. It is time we stop trying to learn from Mao’s China and Castro’s Cuba - and see the remarkable economic reality under our very eyes for all people to enjoy once the American bourgeois colossus can be tumbled and its resources brought to the service of humanity.

The essay was originally written in reply to an attack by Huey Newton on anarchist forms of organisation and reprinted from NEW LEFT NOTES, January 15, 1969, by permission of the author. It was then printed in *Anarchos* magazine.

The text version of this flyer was taken from the *Anarchy Archives*

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Anarchy & Organisation

A Letter to the Left



Murray Bookchin

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

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

The real question at issue is not organisation versus non-organisation, but rather, what kind of organisation. What different kinds of anarchist organisations have in common is that they are developed organically from below, not engineered into existence from above. They are social movements, combining a creative revolutionary lifestyle with a creative revolutionary theory, not political parties, whose node of life is indistinguishable from the surrounding bourgeois environment and whose ideology is reduced to rigid "tried-and-tested programs." They try to reflect as much as is humanly possible the liberated society they seek to achieve, not slavishly duplicate the

prevailing system of hierarchy, class, and authority. They are built around intimate groups of brothers and sisters, whose ability to act in common is based on initiative, convictions freely arrived at, and deep personal involvement, not a bureaucratic apparatus, fleshed out by docile memberships and manipulated from the top by a handful of all-knowing "leaders."

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

I find it curious that while Huey accuses the French Stalinist hacks of merely having "lagged behind the people" he holds the anarchists and Danny Cohn-Bendit responsible for the people being "forced to turn back to DeGaulle." I visited France shortly after the May-June revolt and I can substantiate without the least difficulty how resolutely Danny Cohn Bendit, the March 22nd Movement, and the anarchists tried to develop the assembly forms and action committees into

a "structural program" (indeed, it went far beyond mere "program") to replace the DeGaulle government. I could show quite clearly how they tried to get the workers to retain their hold on the factories and establish direct economic contacts with the peasants: in short, how they tried to replace the French political and economic structure by creative, viable revolutionary forms. In this, they met with continual obstruction from the "disciplined" "centralised" parties of the French "Left" including a number of Trotskyist and Maoist sects.

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