

Q. How are decisions made in an emergency in an anarchist society?

A. The inclusive nature of the decision-making processes in an anarchist society makes it difficult to make quick decisions. It's all very well making decisions when you have the luxury of time on your side, it's another thing making split second decisions in an emergency situation. Hierarchical societies invest the decision-making process in leaders who may or may not have a mandate to make decisions. The chain of command is normally clear and concise, designated individuals make decisions, others are expected to carry them out. The consequences for not following orders, especially in a military situation, can have far reaching consequences.

Although anarchists are very good at making decisions when time is on our side, our ability to make quick decisions in a time of crisis has always been perceived as an integral weakness of the anarchist movement. Anarchists need to have clearly established guidelines that we can follow when quick decisions need to be made. Historically, anarchists in the militias in the Spanish Civil War resolved this problem by investing the power to make decisions to people they trusted or respected. Men and women were elected by their peers with a specific mandate to make decisions for the group in terms of tactics before and during the heat of battle. The mandate they were given and the time they were able to exercise this mandate was limited.

If those they represented lost faith in them or their ability to make decisions, they could be replaced at the next available opportunity. This process gives anarchists the flexibility they need to deal with an emergency. Through trial and error, the best people to deal with an emergency are selected to deal with the situation. The flexibility that this approach creates gives anarchists a real-time advantage to deal with real-time problems that a rigid hierarchical process could never achieve.

So what at first glance may be seen to be a weakness is in reality a "strength". The fluid nature of the process gives anarchists a flexibility to deal with a problem that a hierarchical process cannot hope to match. Anarchists can and do deal with emergencies in a competent and professional manner. There is nothing in the anarchist decision-making process that precludes an anarchist society from dealing with emergencies in an efficient and business like manner. Anarchism provides the framework that allows human beings to effectively deal with problems in a manner that uses the collective experiences and talents of everybody, not just a few leaders.

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