

Understanding Community Organising

Community and grassroots organising are powerful tactics in the toolkit of Anarchism. To clearly answer **how** Anarchists can help to promote grassroots and community organising we must first look at **why** Anarchists should support and engage in community organising in the first place.

Anarchism, unlike other flavours of Communism, is at its very core an ethical philosophy and praxis. The Anarchist goal is to bring about a communist society whose libertarian character is protected by careful attention to the means by which it is achieved. The promotion of tactics that demonstrate the structure of the intended goal insures that Anarchism needs only to scale in order to realise a revolution with a true libertarian character.

Community and grassroots organising serve two main important functions for Anarchists. These functions are relief and example.

There are times when Anarchists will find it an ethical imperative to avert the negative impacts of Capitalism. The scourges imposed can include war, political repression, joblessness, hunger, environmental devastation, sexual discrimination or any number of other crimes. Any movement that is incapable of attending to even the most egregious of these systemic offenses of capitalism has little chance at succeeding in producing an ethical society itself. Hence it is incumbent upon Anarchists in these cases to take immediate efforts to supply relief or protection.

Campaigns and community organising can serve as a showcase and testbed for Anarchist principles. It can be used as a very effective means of propaganda; e.g. "Propaganda by the Deed" in its original and truest sense. In the words of Bakunin¹ "we must spread our principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popu-

lar, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda." It also serves as an empirical study of post-revolutionary institutions and methods.

Keeping in mind the "why" of community organising, we must also pay attention to the "how". There are a number of pitfalls and rules of thumb that need to be kept in mind when organising. The oppressive character of Capitalism serves as a treacherous labyrinth through which libertarian socialists must navigate.

One major danger in community organisational efforts is in the creation of "activist ghettos"; movements which are only able to draw from a limited crowd of activists and not able to reach the broader community in any way.

This is not necessarily a deficiency for all purposes. Organising in this way can serve to promote a limited specifically Anarchist agenda which can then seed and grow movements with broad potential. In fact Platformism itself is such an organisation.

Anarchist-specific organisations may also be used to test and study the organisational structures and tactics which can be used to fight capitalism, or provide alternative libertarian institutions. Such is the case with some worker collectives, cooperatives and communist social experiments.

Community centres and broad appeal action campaigns such as anti-war or environmental campaigns do not benefit from this type of segregation. It marginalises and trivialises the efforts and destroys the capacity to serve as an exemplary non-commercial libertarian social interaction which can provide a social consciousness of Anarchism.

There is also a danger that campaigns started by Anarchists using Anarchist principles will not mention Anarchism anywhere. A prominent example of this in the US is Food-Not-Bombs which has erased almost all association with Anarchism. While this may seem like a means of avoiding ghettoisation of Anarchism by allowing Anarchists to build campaigns with broad appeal without scaring people off with the idea of Anarchism, it in fact serves to further the ghettoisation of Anarchist thought.

The fear and distrust of Anarchism is not exclusively due to the media but also from Anarchists own fears that Anarchist ideas are not with broad appeal. Anarchist ideas are good ideas and a surprisingly large number of people are supportive of them when they find out what they are. Campaigns themselves should be used to promulgate social consciousness of Anarchism.

1. "Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis" (1870) by Mikhail Bakunin

