

Who Cares about Collectives?

We do. Why? Because collectives are the strongest tool we have to put anarchy into practice today, to the extent we can within the confines of the state and capital. The issue of collectives also gets at the heart of the question: What is anarchy and what makes it unique from Marxism, socialism and all the other -isms pushing papers at every demo. and rally? While anarchy is many different things to many different people and we don't claim to have any ideological lock on what anarchy really is, one important thing to realise is that anarchy is a form of organisation and it's significantly different from other types of organisation. Collectives are one very important form of anarchist organisation.

ANARCHY IN ACTION

But what's so great about anarchist forms of organisation, collectives in particular? First and foremost, unlike any other form of organisation, they oppose hierarchy. Collectives are groups of people who band together as complete equals, with no leaders or bosses. This does not mean that everyone has to be equally good (or equally mediocre) at all tasks, only that no one in the collective has more political or social power than another. No other form of organisation in the world opposes hierarchy, which means that all other forms of organisation promote and practice inequality, and therefore coercion and authoritarianism. Secondly, collectives are like a good project: they are DO-IT-YOURSELF. Collectives define their own tasks and objectives and they put their own resources to work to complete their tasks, interacting with other collectives or persons outside of the

collectives as they see fit.

Collectives function according to several key anarchist principles: direct democracy, full participation of all collective members, equality, autonomy, mutual aid, and resolute opposition to hierarchy and domination. This is the kind of world we want in the future, and so this is the way we need to organise our lives now.

Collective membership can be defined in several ways: by work place or trade, by locality, by politics, by identity (i.e. a collective of women, gays etc.), by common interest, or by any combination of the above.

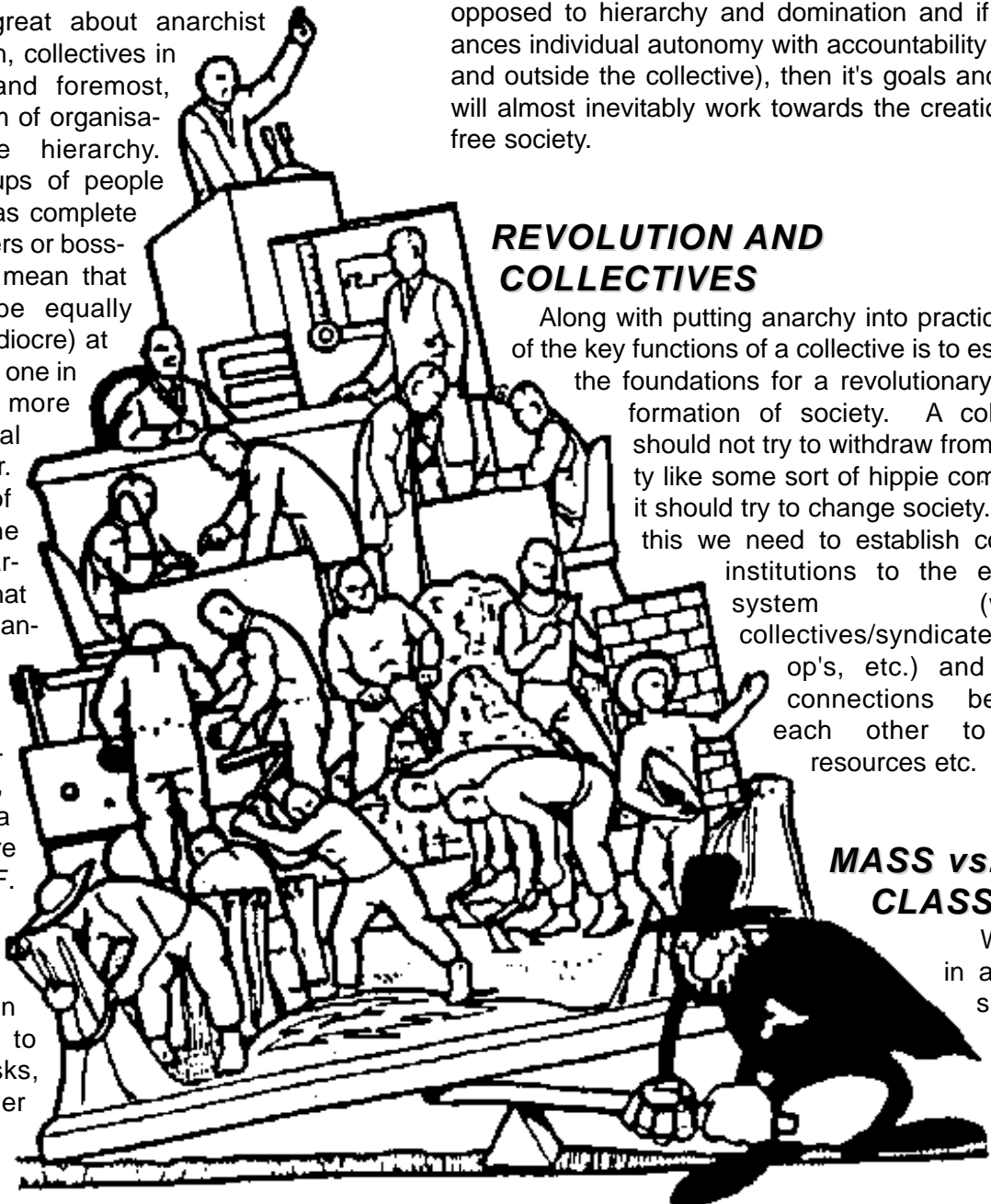
The key to creating an anarchist society is not the make up of a collective, or even it's goals. The key importance of a collective to an anarchist society is it's organisation. If a collective is organised in a way opposed to hierarchy and domination and if it balances individual autonomy with accountability (within and outside the collective), then it's goals and tasks will almost inevitably work towards the creation of a free society.

REVOLUTION AND COLLECTIVES

Along with putting anarchy into practice, one of the key functions of a collective is to establish the foundations for a revolutionary transformation of society. A collective should not try to withdraw from society like some sort of hippie commune; it should try to change society. To do this we need to establish counter-institutions to the existing system (worker collectives/syndicates, co-op's, etc.) and make connections between each other to pool resources etc.

MASS vs. CLASS

We live in a mass society, where our individuality



is stifled by the choice between brown or white sugar and our ability to work with each other co-operatively is hampered by both the myth of the rugged individual and the mass movement, As the important pamphlet *ANTI-MASS: Methods of Organisation for Collectives* points out, just like you fight fire with water, not fire, you fight mass society not with mass movements but with class-consciousness. By class-consciousness we don't mean the mythical idealised proletariat or any other purely economic grouping of people (though economics and capitalism are certainly very important). By class we mean that we recognise that we, and others like us, are relatively powerless - politically and socially - in this system and that the relationship between the powerless and powerful is antagonistic and utterly irreconcilable: The powerful must be destroyed. Importantly, this kind of class-consciousness also means we understand our relationship with other politically and socially powerless groups in this society (women, gays, animals, eco-systems etc.) and recognise that there are big differences in power and privilege among us.

Collectives organise people as a class, not as a mass. The revolutionary object of a collective is its replication, not recruiting new members. That's why we don't want people to join us unless we ask them: We want people to form their *own* collectives. Collectives work to create the politicisation of people as autonomous, free-thinking, egalitarian people, not as a mass, a vanguard or a party. As Bruce Kala in the journal *Slingshot* wrote, We can't - and shouldn't try to - create non-hierarchical collectives spanning our cities from ghetto to barrio. We can and should organise ourselves, directly, non-hierarchically, on the level we can, beginning with affinity groups and political collectives.

DIY IN YOUR FACE

Direct organisation of our lives. DIY. That's what collectives are about. If we're going to directly organise our lives, we need to talk to each other. For these reasons, collectives should be small and encourage face-to-face communication. Face-to-face communication encourages collectives to be democratic, non-hierarchical, equal and (sometimes painfully) honest.

Also, a small, tightly-knit collective of people who trust each other is virtually impossible to infiltrate. Although there is always the danger of a collective closing in on itself and becoming limited (that is why collectives must talk with other collectives), the collective is the building block or larger forms of participatory, democratic organisation.

Organising and developing counter-institutions collectively does not create anarchy overnight. It took Spanish anarchists seventy years of organising collectives to build a class with revolutionary potential. Remember, changing social relations is a *process*, not an inevitable by-product of revolution. We can't expect to unlearn our racism and sexism and anthropocentrism overnight. We can't wait for the state to fall; we gotta do-it-ourselves.

WHAT NEEDS DOING

Organising ourselves means we need to break away from the ways or thinking most of us have. We'll spell it out for you: we want people who want serious radical change in this world, to form their own collectives of three, four, ten people; whatever. We want collective members to start talking, reading, discussing and laughing with each other. Examine racism, sexism and homophobia and all other forms of oppression within your collective. Political thinking should be part of everyday life, not a class privilege. Start talking within the collective, then start talking to other collectives. If you can, collectivise your workplace, start your own collective workplace, take on a collective project... Most importantly, don't let someone else organise your life for you. *Do it yourself!*

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