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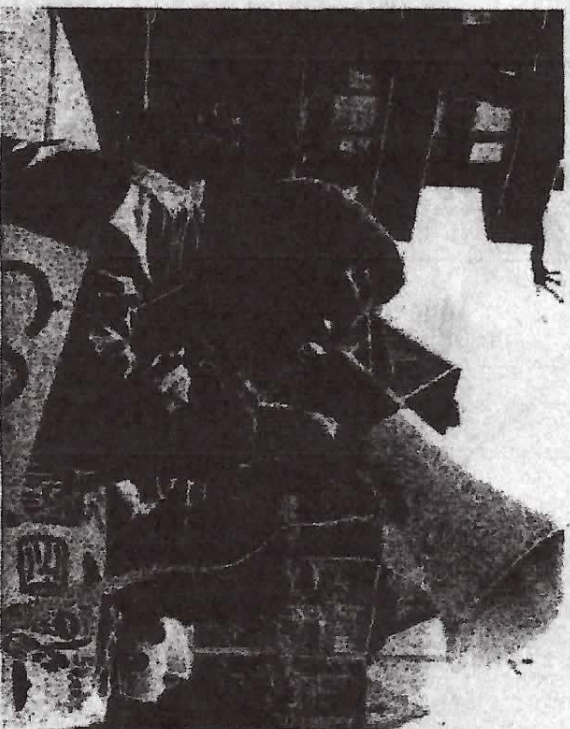
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Cookie Cutter (Counter) Revolution: On the Praxis of Organizing



Pedro Ribeiro

The main thrust for the members to do work in the organization is that the organization belongs (intellectually, materially and spiritually) to them. Their power in the organization, their ability to change the destiny of the organization - all of that is defined and controlled by the members.

The objective of this pamphlet is to get anarchists rethinking their organizing strategy and stop doing work that is not beneficial to the people's liberation cause, and instead engage in work that will generate a meaningful expression of popular power, which is the only and sole power that can destroy the bourgeois apparatus of control. It is to get anarchists to be strategic about their actions, their praxis and their analysis.

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- Pedro Ribeiro of the *Furious Five Revolutionary Collective*.

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Introduction - About the Praxis and Structure of a Relevant and Revolutionary Understanding of a People's Movement

The idea behind this essay is to analyze the structural flaws of the cookie-cutter style of organizing that seem to be have rooted itself into our midst and its relevance, and its potential threat, to the emergence of a people's movement. In the development of the people's liberation movement, it is fundamental for us to analyze the role other organizations play in that struggle. The simplistic mentality that good intentions are enough and that any work is good work won't cut it. There is the necessity of being critical of the results and effects that certain kinds of activities might create. The approach necessary to understand these phenomena must be the dialectical view that society, as a living organism, have more than synthetic relationships with its parts, it has an organic relationship of interdependence with them. Institutions are more than responses to specific issues of a society, they are reflective and symptomatic of the characteristics of this society and their relationship with the people is even deeper than symptomatic, they actually set the pace of the strength and place of the people within society. A change in society, a radical change of society to empower people must be set in institutions that not only reflect but actually creates power of the people.

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People's movement, however, have been defined loosely and poorly by people not only in the Left, but also by the institutions of power. As libertarian socialists, as anarchists, it is in our interest to define people's movement differently and more precisely than the way defined by the general Left, especially for the reason that we believe that these are the forces for social change, the popular social movement of the oppressed groups and classes are the revolutionary agent that will remake society by the means of social revolution. Furthermore, is in our interest to understand why the idea of a people's movement have been so poorly defined - what are the interests behind this broad vision of what is a people's movement and how does it work.

People's movement, as we define it, is not expressed in its numbers, in the amount of people involved in it, and not even how involved people are (in terms of risk taking and dedication). It is defined also in its praxis and its process. A people's movement is not only popular in its quantity, but is also popular in its quality. It reflects the aspirations, desires and struggle of a people and their dedication to the cause they are fighting for, as opposed to the teachings of a political cadre or vanguard organization. A movement is not a people's movement just because it encompasses a large amount of people, but it needs to be also led by the people and for the people - in the dialectics of this process, it is necessary for a people's movement to be organically linked to the people and to people's will; the result of the symbiosis between the everyday consciousness and drive for action. This movement, a true people's movement, is this

be a ladder that actually furthers and expresses that analysis. Further than that, the organization of the people should be owned by the people, led by the people (not necessarily by the anarchists) and for the people. The subjects of the organizational action should be the same as the agents of such action - the relationship of the organization should be one of self-interest to the measure that the actions and praxis of it are dictated by the needs and aspirations of its members.

It is important then to understand that the idea of doing "what is best for the people" fails to recognize the people's potential and plays into the structure set by the capitalist in which the workers are considered uneducated and too ignorant to fix their own problems. The sad twist is that the proletariat, being raised in such an environment, comes to believe that it is itself without power and without the capacity of analysis - this is better off done by intellectuals and people with degrees.

The revolutionary organization has as a goal primarily the breaking away from this capitalist trap mentality by being an alternative for the people to develop their own power and praxis. By exercising their own power and through the struggle for their own good, by defining the struggle through their own lenses and developing a praxis that is conditioned to their own reality, the members of the revolutionary mass organization awaken their own sense of power and inspire those around them. The organization becomes a model of popular power, an alternative to State controlled power and vanguardist led organizing.

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cycle of ineffectual and non-strategic actions and to fighting the liberal fights.

Part II - Organizations, Ownership and the Idea of Power in Terms of Liberation Struggles and the Role of Anarchist Praxis in Organizing

The main question that then presents itself is how can it be done differently? What is the alternative presented by the anarchist to the non-profit style of organizing and how can that be implemented?

Organizers often complain about people's apathy and disinterest - the people do not seem to care or yet fully understand the brutality of their plight. However, historically, the people affected by an issue are always the more radical element of the struggle. They always aim higher and always fight harder.

So where does this contradiction lie? How do apathetic masses become revolutionary people?

It is our belief that the people are inherently revolutionary and that through systemic deception and disempowerment, the capitalist structure exerts the counterrevolutionary influence that hinders the people from the realization of their own self-power, as discussed earlier. We already discussed also the potential of an analysis developed by the oppressed and how they are the most revolutionary sector of that struggle.

The revolutionary organization should not be a blockage to the development of this analysis but instead it should

consciousness taking form of struggle through the actions of the people.

In understanding this concept of a people's movement, the dynamics of how this movement come about to happen are definitively decisive in its results. As anarchists, what we seek is the empowerment of the people and the destruction of authoritarianism, the culmination of the final emancipation of the oppressed people. As anarchists too, we understand that the means must be coherent with the ends, and that the idea of empowerment through disempowering or the idea of liberation through coercion is foul and pernicious.

The cookie-cutter, non-profit style of organizing is, unfortunately, not restricted to non-profit organizations, but in reality is present even in self-proclaimed revolutionary organizations. It seems to be that a failure in strategic analysis of the praxis and the relevance of this kind of organization and the role of revolutionary anarchists in the people's movement seems to lead to a search for any kind of activity that "help people out" in the immediate present, without foreseeing the actual costs of such an action.

This is not to say that the work and issues tackled by non-profits should not be done and to fight for reforms and everyday issues like housing and against police brutality are reformist in nature and cannot serve a revolutionary purpose. The problem lays in the approach and the means for struggle and how they empower or disempower people. The practical part of a movement is as, if not more important, than theory, and the dynamics

of power is something more complex than simply who gets the benefits of the struggle (the results per se).

Part I - The Understanding of The Problem Posed By Non-Profit Style of Organizing in the Prospect of a Relevant People's Liberation Movement

We should then analyze the praxis that defines the non-profit style of organizing as different from a more radical/revolutionary school of organizing, and what are the roots and the organizational methods of the non-profit school and why should they be avoided by those that are serious in their revolutionary practice.

The distrust of the authoritarian left and the growing bourgeois tendencies that have been affecting the anarchist movement seem to leave a lot of seriously devoted anarchists at loss of what to do in order to fight the capitalist structure. At these serious moments that we live in, desperation have turned anarchists to try and fight any fight by any means possible, not by any means necessary. The desperation and the not seeing of an alternative form of organizing have led anarchists to fight the liberal fight, to actively engage in the defense of the next "green" candidate or to take a non-profit reformist attitude even when doing work full of revolutionary potential.

In analyzing the results of the non-profit form of organizing and the relationship with its praxis, we must first understand what is this praxis and how the results are achieved the way they are.

Non-profit style of organizing is generally, issue-based.

attempt of seizing power from the Right, or one of revolutionary desperation, an isolationist alienating position of taking up "symbolic" fights against the capitalist - the "Black Bloc" is being the most obvious example we can give.

This desperate position of the Left is a direct consequence from the failure of the authoritarian left and the state of total disarray that the libertarian left have found itself since the defeat in Spain. The almost destruction of the Anarcho-syndicalist and Anarchist-communist movement be either through the defeat of Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian libertarian movement, or be the defeat of the CNT/FAI by the hands of Franco combined with the betrayal by the communist party and the Comintern, the 30's represent worldwide the initiation of a dark era for the anarchist movement, one of detachment from the realities of people and the establishment of an highly intellectualized individualistic version of anarchism that have its predecessor in Max Stirner.

The rebirth of the anarchist movement is nothing sort of phenomenal. It will stand as a mark and a representation of the fruit of work of those that dedicated themselves to the struggle, and the revolutionary spirit that lies in the hearts of the people. But anarchism in the United States faces an awkward situation. It needs to relearn from a distant past with which it might feel very small connection with and from a working class which anarchism has been sadly distanced from. This disconnection with anything solid, led anarchists to a

still ours. The counterrevolutionary influence of Capitalism keeps us from realizing and utilizing it.

Unless the praxis of an institution is developed in order to stimulate people's use of their own power in every step, such praxis hinders the development of a revolutionary atmosphere, being so a counterrevolutionary force. The counterrevolutionary strength of the non-profit organizing lies in the separation of the intellectual process from the actual experience of the people. The unrealized of the power of the people and its separation, especially, from the concretization of the historic victories of the oppressed in their eternal fight for liberation led to the elitization of strategic thinking into this new activist intelligentsia, to the parmentalization of the process of revolutionary development into active and passive intellectual actors of the revolution.

The lack of strategy and, more than that, the lack of a rethinking and analyzing the goals of the organization - created by the exclusion of the working class from the intellectual process of such organizations - leads the non-profits to cycle of repeating their own mistakes over and over again.

The post-leftist critique is correct in one thing - the Left is old. Through its vanguardist mentality that excludes people from the creation of the praxis of the Left and the idolizing of old left gods, the Left have been unable to create and adapt to the present times. Its strategy have been either one of resignation and helping the conformist left (i.e.: the social democrats) in their failed and asinine

This means that this kind of organization normally pick an issue, and works on that issue. That issue can be anything - from anti-war to health care, from animal liberation to feeding the poor. The issue is picked beforehand and then there is the "targeting" of a certain group - the affected by the issue.

Giving an example, a non-profit is created under some flashy name and commits itself to fighting gentrification in a certain area. It gathers information about who is getting affected by the gentrification process, who is doing the gentrification, ten year projections and the other "crucial" information about the situation.

Throughout all the process, however, the people that are affected by the issue themselves have never been consulted. They are never asked of what their problems are really in the first place, it is only assumed that gentrification is or should be their main concern. The analysis is formed by the "activist" is this way and analysis is not shaped by the affected. The arrogance of such a patronizing stance seems to be lost for those that work in this way and the fact that people are passive in this equation does not seems to bother them.

This passive stance of the people into a struggle is a fundamental problem into the development of a serious people's movement. As said earlier, the praxis of the people's movement should be of the people leading the people - in no other way can a real people's movement emerge. If, however, from the beginning, people are seen as the object, and not the subject; if people are only the targets of the actions, the beneficiaries but not the actors,

then the idea of the people's movement is lost and done for.

There is a tendency of confusing (intentionally or not) what it means for the people to actively experience the struggle and being an active part of a movement. The people's involvement must be more than superficial, like going into marches or signing petitions - they are not bodies to fill a quota for a rally. Their hands are capable of creating something for themselves, and not become sock puppets to the "revolutionary" cadre. Is paramount to the work of the organizer to understand and apply that principle - the role of the revolutionary organizer is to awaken this hand and the consciousness that moves it in order to give them a forum for action and reflection on their actions through engaging the oppressed around everyday issues. Through the process, it is fundamental that the people's voice be the central voice for the formulation and understanding of the problem to the final realization of the goal. The intellectual process and the development of a strategy cannot be mechanized or a simple exercise of people's ability to follow directions, which are staples of the non-profit style. Elaborate flowcharts of organizing theory presented to their "constituency" leave no thinking left for the people engaging in the action. Not to say that organizing models and flowcharts are not useful, but to say that the world is so much more complicated and organic, and people are so much smarter.

It is counterproductive for the creation and strengthening of the people's movement to have a strategy and a goal defined before the input of the people themselves. This

their own power is counterrevolutionary, as much as a police officer that beats someone into submission somewhere in the ghetto is counterrevolutionary. This is not about which intentions or motivations drive the action - this is a dialectical analysis of the result of these actions and how they promote or hinder the revolution.

The means must be coherent with the ends. The battle is as important in the process of developing the revolutionary strength of the people. The vanguard of the Leninist tradition, its elitist mentality, is deeply entrenched in the non-profit. The idea that the people need the work done for them, that the intellectual process needs to be laid out beforehand, it makes the people nothing more than puppets in the hands of the intellectual organizers. Anarchists have always been in the opposition of the intellectual rule as much as against the capitalist rule - Michael Bakunin argued against the Marxist rule of the intelligentsia much before the de facto concretization of such a rule by the Bolshevik hijacking of the Russian Revolution.

This takes us back to the nature of power and its realization. Rest assured we believe that the people have more than enough power to shake capitalism into crumbs. It is the realization of such power (both intellectually and concretely) that keeps us under the bourgeois rule. The ugly hand of Capitalism have distorted the history of people's struggle and stripped us from our sense of self-power. Our power is always attributed to another; is always out of our time, or out of our context. Is never here, is never now. But the power is

same pathology affect the real Left, especially anarchist groups.

Is our understanding that revolutionaries feel that non-profits can evolve to a revolutionary potential.

Authoritarians and libertarians alike see non-profits as vehicles of popular power and a way to tap into that power - a very limited vision and understanding of popular power. But we argue that, for the anarchist revolution, non-profit style of organizing is not revolutionary, but it possesses dangerous counterrevolutionary forces. Is no wonder that the structure is encouraged and set up by the State.

The liberal theology of Social Democracy and the Leninist idea of State Capitalism are directly confrontational with the ideal of Libertarian Socialism. They represent counterrevolutionary forces and their imposition does not benefit the emancipation of the working class anymore than the maintenance of the slavery system of Bourgeois Capitalism. The understanding of these principles must be fundamental to the praxis of revolutionary anarchism - that the means must be coherent with the ends and that the revolution is the process of the emancipation of the working-class of all systems of oppression. These principles, when applied to the analysis of non-profit organizing, illustrate their counterrevolutionary nature.

When we say counterrevolutionary, we mean exactly that - a force that hinders the empowerment of the people and impedes the process of the proletarian revolution. A form of organizing that block people from the realization of

process, in excluding the people from the initial decision-making, demonstrate the vanguardist element present in the non-profit organizing, that believes the people to be too ignorant to know what is best for them.

It is unnecessary to explain why that vanguardist practice is a pernicious idea and why is it that libertarian socialists should be in guard against the practicing or defending of such attitudes.

Non-Profit style of organizing has a non-democratic structure of decision making, especially in what concerns the path that the organization should follow. This normally takes the form of stratified hierarchical structures, with bosses a.k.a. executive directors and board of directors (a structure conveniently created by the government for the non-profits to follow) and employees, and the targeted market being the people waiting to be "liberated" from the latest plague unleashed by the capitalist. In more "radical" settings, this trend of organizing situates the line between the population and the staff of "organizers."

By means of revolutionary praxis, the democratization of the intellectual process and the structural revolutionary development of a movement are fundamental in order to create distribution of power, like a flock of sheep waits for the non-profit organizer shepard. Power, by its own nature, cannot be received passively. The active engagement into the struggle is necessary for people to acquire an idea of their own power.

There is no empowerment of the people if all they do is follow a pre-designed script that tells them which politician vote for, which rally to go to, which speech to listen to, even if it is in 'their own best interest'. This just leads to the people being cannon fodder for one or another bureaucrat. The real power of the people can only be awakened by exercising it. But to think that the real power of the people is muscle power and that the people have no realization of their own plight or capacity for their own liberation until a more "illuminated" mind explains it to them according to the last intellectual study - that demonstrates an arrogant vanguardist mentality that does not foster the creation of a real people's movement.

Non-profit organizing generally fails to recognize that its own structure is correlates to the results it achieves, and if its structure demands concentrated power, whatever result they achieve throughout their process, it will hinder power to be exercised by those that should really yield it.

Sometimes (more often than not) the non-profit is formed by a dedicated group of activists, in the role of staff, and has no real membership. In this case, the non-profit itself becomes the catalyst of changes and the people become muscle to be flexed when the time is right. The exclusion of the people from the intellectual process is visible again.

More than that, without members, or membership democracy, the decision of where the organization is going and what should the path of the organization be. In here, exactly, lies the worse dampening of revolutionary

potential for every organization or movement. The staff can never be as revolutionary as the members, because it is the members that have more at stake in the whole process.

The staff normally enjoys a position of privilege and is positioned in a comfort zone which blinds them to the extreme realities of the struggle and allows them a position of security inside the structure of nowadays society. This is not to say that this position in taken in a conscious way - the flaw is inherently structural. Just like the capitalist structure makes sure to maintain the distance between the bourgeoisie and the working class, and make sure that the bourgeois cannot understand the plight and the desperation of the workers, so in the same way the non-profit structure maintains the stratification between subject and object, the active and the passive, in its structure and keeps to itself to power of being the instrument of change, the button to be pressed to unleash the fury to the oppressed.

By understanding how the praxis of the non-profit style organization is fundamental for the maintaining of the status quo for it breaks the people away from the effectual changes in society, is not so surprising the fact that today we have non-profit corporations - it becomes a capitalist enterprise like any other.

And finally, non-profit style of organizing lacks of a strategic plan of a more revolutionary agenda. While most of them are openly and explicitly working within the boundaries of the status quo and have no pretension of overthrowing capitalism (the most they seek is to "reform" it), is alarming and disheartening to see the