



# The Prefigurative Organization

BY

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# INTRODUCTION

There are a lot of ideologies, movements and organizations which have tried to fundamentally change the world. If we take a look around, we quickly find out that this has not yet been successful: the global society is marked by extreme poverty, gruesome wars, enormous environmental crises and deep social problems. In part, none of these movements have been successful because they've often ended up reproducing the same authoritarian structure they've wanted to defeat. First in their own organizations and then – for those who've reached power – in the society as such. Anarchists want a totally different society. To reach this society we need to be organized, but how do we do that without reproducing the social relationship we wish to defeat? To do so we have two superb toolboxes: direct democracy & direct action.

This particular pamphlet is dedicated to direct democracy. Amongst other things, we will see what the difference is between *direct* and *indirect* democracy, *formal* and *informal* organizational structures, *anarchist* view on leadership and *socialist* view on leadership. The main part explains each of the direct-democratic tools, why direct democracy is effective and how we can go implementing it in practice. It's followed by one appendix which discusses Anarchist Leadership, and one that discusses Consensus, Network Organizations and Hidden Power. We'll wrap it up with an assortment of questions which can be used for self-education or to kick-start discussions in study groups.

## ***Anarchism VS Socialism***

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**In the revolutionary movement that aims to crush the capitalist society, and create a new society based on freedom, well-being and democracy, there are primarily two strategies: One of these is socialism<sup>(i)</sup>, and the other is anarchism. These have largely agreed upon *the goal*: a stateless, classless society, where the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. What separates these two movements from each other are *the means* they use in the struggle for this new society.**

Socialists think one should build strongly centralized organizations. They say that “since our enemy is strongly centralized, it is also necessary that we are strongly centralized”. Thus they build hierarchal parties where the power is concentrated in its leaders and central committees . Broadly speaking, we can say that one group writes their publications, while another one distributes them. One group is paid to work full time with politics, while another group has to work full time to finance the “professional revolutionaries”. One group makes the decisions, while another group executes them. In this way the division between leaders and led is reproduced.

Unfortunately, it’s not only the party which shall be strongly centralized, but also the transitional society they wish to establish – socialism – shall be permeated with centralism. A communist society will – in spite of everything – not be consolidated over night. Reactionary elements of the working class and petty bourgeois (especially fascists) will receive aid from the ruling class to exert resistance to the revolution. To defeat this resistance they argue we need police, prisons, courts, and the military – in other words: a state. In theory, this state shall be run by the working class – a so called “workers’ state” – and shall at an uncertain

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(i) The term “socialism” and the term “socialists” have a lot of different definitions. For example: “Socialism” can imply a reformist welfare state system or an authoritarian dictatorship, while “socialist” is a generic term for a revolutionary, or a communist, or an utopian. Throughout this text, the term is used to denote those who wish for a free, stateless, classless communist society, but who believe there has to be a transitional “socialist” stage – dominated by a “socialist state” – between the capitalist and communist society. Here, it is used mostly to denote revolutionary socialists, but the critique is valid for a lot of reformist socialists as well.

time wither away. But in practice, this new state has been ruled by the party leadership, and the withering has never occurred. Socialism has had the opportunity to show its practical validity – or to be correct *invalidity* – more than enough times: in Cuba, China, more or less the whole of Eastern Europe, and a lot of other countries.<sup>(i)</sup> Each and all attempts ended in brutal dictatorships.

One of the attempts was the “Soviet Union”.<sup>(ii)</sup> In the Russian revolution in 1917, the socialist Bolshevik party seized power. They quickly started building a new state: in the army they re-established the officers’ power, in the workplaces they appointed leaders with unrestricted power, and to undermine all those who didn’t tolerate the Bolsheviks advancement to a new ruling class, they established a secret police which monitored, imprisoned, and killed dissidents. These “new” state organizations were then used by a strongly hierarchal ruling class, in the same way police and the military are used throughout the world: to suppress the workers’ movement and to conduct imperialist wars. Not only did the Bolsheviks build a state, they built an all-embracing and extremely oppressive, bureaucratic monster, which suffocated the revolution and lured the international revolutionary movement into a blind alley. A blind alley which it first now – after the fall of the “Soviet Union” in the start of the 90’s – barely starts to get out of.

In short: To fight centralism, socialists want to use centralism, and to crush the state, socialists want to build a new state.<sup>(iii)</sup>

Anarchists have a totally different point of departure. As the Russian

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(i) Few socialists support all of these dictatorships and dictators, but the overwhelming majority of them support Russia’s Lenin, and either Stalin or Trotsky as his successor. Quite a few also support China’s Mao and Cuba’s Castro, and the maddest ones even support dictators like Cambodia’s Pol Pot. There are also socialists who don’t support any of these dictatorships – such as council communists and some left communists – but they account for an infinitesimal portion of the socialists.

(ii) Soviet is really a Russian word for “council”. These councils (workers’ councils, soldiers’ councils and community councils) had direct-democratic qualities, and were the building blocks of the Russian revolution in 1917. As these organs were brutally crushed by the state, it’s misleading to call this state the “Soviet Union”.

(iii) To be fair, it has to be emphasized that not all socialist organizations are that centralized and not all anarchist organizations are that decentralized. What we deal with here are general tendencies.

revolution teaches us, the measures one uses are intrinsically connected to what kind of result one achieves. Therefore, our point of departure has to be our goal. What we want is a direct-democratic society where everyone has the possibility to influence decisions that affect them, in proportion to how much the decisions affect them. Furthermore: That each and every participant in these direct-democratic processes has the self-confidence, knowledge, skills, and resources to be able to participate on equal terms as all other participants. This must also be our point of departure for how we organize here and now.

## ***The Material Foundation of Freedom***

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**To even have the possibility to be an active participant in a democratic process, it has to be underpinned by a *material* foundation.**

If one is not able to cover one's primary needs, such as food, shelter, clothes and medicine, it's irrelevant if one is offered the opportunity to participate in the great democracy. Likewise, if one must work around the clock to cover these needs, the theoretical possibility to participate is rendered irrelevant. Neither is it a real democracy if your political opponent possesses enormous resources which he can use to hire other people to do research, construct arguments and thereafter totally drown your message with means of mass communication (TV, internet, cinema, newspapers, etc.). The material prerequisites to even be able to participate in democratic processes – on an equal footing with everyone else – are thus that:

1. Primary needs are covered;
2. There is sufficient time to develop knowledge, skills and debate; and
3. There is equal access to means of production and distribution for mass communication, and other things which are needed for effective organizing (such as venues, internet and projectors).

Each and every human will be guaranteed these prerequisites in a communist society. But the problem is that we don't live in a communist

society! We live in a capitalist system where these material prerequisites for genuine democracy don't even exist. Within this society we can't take the responsibility for providing these prerequisites. As a matter of fact, our opinion is that a revolution is needed to change this! *But how do manage to balance this unfavorable situation with our ideal of prefigurativity?*<sup>(i)</sup>

The answer has to be that even though we wish to reflect the new society within our own organizations, the way our organization works, and the way the future society works, necessarily have to be different. That's why we have to make the best out of the situation and *aspire* prefigurativity the best we can. To be concrete, this implies – amongst other things – that we can't have inflexible member dues which are set independent of whether or not one has work, whether or not one has dependents, and what kind of work one does; that access to means of communication and other equipment that's necessary to organize effectively is as equal as possible; and that the responsibility to relieve members who have little time (for instance because of children, sick parents, or similar) is rotated. Now, when this is made clear, we can move on and take a look at the direct-democratic tools.

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## ***The Direct-democratic Toolbox***

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**To best be able to reflect the society we wish for, we use a set of specific direct-democratic tools. The anarchist movement has utilized direct democracy for a long while. To reach decisions through assemblies, send delegates with defined mandates, and recall them if they don't do as their members wish, is conventional practice. It's just as usual to talk about how the practice must reflect the society we wish to create. Still, there exists a certain tendency to reduce these tools to exalted phrases and naive idealism – something we can't build a new society with. The reason is often that not all anarchists have concretized and pinpointed the direct-democratic tools in a sufficient way. Here, I will try to give a short,**

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(i) The term prefigurativity implies that one reflects the future by creating the future here and now.

**but precise explanation of each of these tools. Not all of them are conventional tools, but they all fall well within the anarchist tradition. Together these tools empower us to realize the ideal that each person shall have the possibility to influence decisions, to the degree the decisions influence them.**

## **Forming Opinions**

*In a true democracy one has to be allowed to find, process and express information as oneself wishes. But one also has to have the possibility to organize, in order to be able to cooperate with people of the same opinion to effectively exert influence. We'll take a closer look at these three fundamental rights: the right to transparency, the right to expression and the right to organize.*

### **1. The Right to Transparency**

To be able to form an opinion, it's important to have the possibility to find all relevant information. Only in that way one can build up a good foundation to reach decisions on, as well as find information that helps to present one's argument.

For there to even be meaning to the possibility to find and examine relevant information, such information has to exist. Thus, it is important that there exist clearly defined rules for what and how information should be recorded and archived, and how one can get access to the information.<sup>(i)</sup>

Even though there is information which doesn't have – and shouldn't have – rules on how it should be archived, there shall still exist full

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(i) As an example: What should be archived can be the receipts a treasurer receives when she makes purchases on behalf of the organization. How it should be archived can be that she has to take pictures of everything she buys and insert hyperlinks to every post in the budget, so one can browse what is actually hidden beneath each post, accompanied by an explanation of what the purchase is and when it was decided by who, to purchase it. In that way, one who is a bit skeptical about a post in the budget called "wirecloser", can click on the word to get an explanation of what a wirecloser is, with the help of a picture and a description, as well as the possibility to see when and who decided upon the purchase of the wirecloser. How one can get access, could be that it should be published on an internal website no later than two weeks later than the purchase was made.

transparency to this information. The right to information must be maximal.<sup>(i)</sup>

Of course, this doesn't imply that one should have the right to break into other people's rooms to search for a document, take the notes away from the person that sits next to you, or install hidden cameras at the meeting space. Common sense says that the right to transparency only pertains to information that could be relevant, and stops where it violates the right to privacy. Exactly where the line is drawn between relevant information and privacy is hard to ascertain, and has to be decided upon case by case.

## **2. The Right to Expression**

With the right to transparency one has the ability to find relevant information, so one can make an informed opinion. One then has to be allowed to express this opinion, so one can influence and convince other people. As anarchists we believe the right to express oneself should be maximal. One has to be allowed to express one's opinions on whatever issue, in whatever way – even if it's highly controversial. And as we ascertained a bit earlier, one has to – for the right to expression to be real – also have access to tools for presentation, production and distribution of one's opinions. In practice this implies that to the greatest degree possible, one must try to develop collective skills in making prints, publicity on the internet, and gain access to a projector for audiovisual presentations, etc.

But does that imply that we should be allowed to call our fellow human beings “whore”, “nigger”, “faggot” and other degrading terms? No, of course not. The right to expression stops where it infringes upon people's freedom from harassment. Where this line is drawn is difficult to define, and must be viewed on a case by case basis.

## **3. The Right to Organize**

To best be able to spread one's opinions, it's important to have the right to organize, so one can spread those opinions more effectively. A lot of

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(i) This is not how it is in the US today. The State Department – for instance – possesses thousands of secret documents which are important to form an opinion. No branch of an anarchist organization can be allowed to store thousands of secret documents.

socialist organizations have prohibited organized factions. This is true for the Russian Communist Party and a lot of the other communist parties around the world. The reason is that they (often the central committee) are afraid that the status quo is challenged. Afraid! For what? Well, for democracy. It's obvious that anarchists can't behave in such a fashion. We have to give those who have a different opinion than the organization's given political line a possibility to get together, exactly for the purpose of challenging this given line.

Does that imply that one can allow a racist and anti-democratic faction? Once again, the answer is no. Only factions that have as their goal to change strategic and tactical decisions – not the core principles of our politics – should be allowed.

## Referendums

*The right to transparency, expression, and organization exist to ensure that the forming of opinions works in a democratic fashion. But that is not at all sufficient. The most popular opinions must be put into practice, so that the greatest number of people will be as content as possible. To put these opinions into practice, referendums are used. The anarchist view on referendums also differs from conventional views. Naturally, we're proponents of universal suffrage – as well as quorums – but at the same time we differ from a lot bourgeois views on referendums.*

### 4. Voting for motions, rather than individuals

Everywhere you look in today's society you'll see leaders – everything is about leaders. The reason is that capitalism – which is built upon the empowerment of the few – necessitates the disempowerment of the many. Independent political activity – self-activity – is unwanted precisely because it builds the individual's self-confidence, self-esteem and knowledge. That is why so many of today's referendums focus on individuals. You can choose state representatives, student leaders, and union leaders. It doesn't mean that you'll never be able to vote directly for a certain cause – for instance yes or no to the constitution of the European Union, yes or no to a boycott of an exam, or yes or no to a strike. But it means that a disproportionately huge focus for referendums

is to choose all sorts of leaders – local leaders, national leaders, committee leaders. These often have undefined – or so broadly defined – mandates that they're able to exert influence on what is to be prioritized and how to implement it. Decision making is thus not direct, rather it's mediated.

The anarchists' point of departure is different. As we want the individual to be empowered and to take responsibility for themselves, we also want a maximum freedom of choice. When possible we thus prefer to vote directly on the motions, rather than individuals.

### **5. Instant Referendums**

In the past, when an international congress was organized, one chose a certain number of delegates who could travel for many days, in order to reach the congress. When they finally came back, they had to give a report to the main office of the organization, which then could send copies of the protocol to the local organizations, so they could decide whether to approve or disapprove it. When a large organization has to make decisions about events that change drastically within a short period (as for instance mass strikes can do), the members could have changed their opinion the day the delegate returned, and thus making the congress obsolete! Due to less advanced means of communication and transportation, it wasn't feasible to organize such congresses more than one time each year – at maximum.

Today this has been turned upside down. By using our computer, mobile phone or even digital television, we can immediately cast our vote. The geographical distance is rendered irrelevant. Information and communication technology makes it possible – for the first time in world history – to continually have dynamic, direct-democratic processes over large areas. The democracy of a big organization does not longer need to be a yearly affair. The possibility to vote any time, makes the process flexible and responsive to sudden changes in opinion.

Anarchists who have the privilege to live in countries where computers and access to the internet is affordable should use this possibility, by incorporating it in their constitution and the organization's daily

business and by having an internet system which is easy to learn how to use.

## 6. Opinion Points

In proper direct-democratic referendums the decisions represent the collective will. That is something which is often not achieved by conventional voting methods. Let's take a look at an example.

Let's say a small anarchist organization of ten people has a congress, where they're supposed to choose one main campaign for the year to come. There are two different campaigns which are proposed: an anti-war and an anti-eviction campaign. Everyone agrees that they have to prioritize only one of the campaigns to be able make any substantial contribution to it, but they disagree on which one to choose. They can't reach consensus, so they choose to go to a vote.

A small majority of six people would like to prioritize the anti-eviction campaign, but they don't feel strongly about it at all. On the other hand, the minority of four feel it's *very* important to prioritize the anti-war campaign. One of the reasons they feel it's very important, is because they have sisters, brothers and friends in the military. They are more affected by the decision. We can observe that there are different levels of how much a person cares about a certain thing, and *how much* they'd like a certain alternative to be chosen.

Well, that's something a conventional system of referendum completely ignores. In such a system the six people who'd like to see the anti-eviction campaign be chosen – but don't really feel that strongly about the issue – trumps. On the other hand, those four people who so much would like to prioritize the anti-war campaign loses. It's a rigid "either/or" method that doesn't take into account how strongly the different voters would like to see their preferred alternative chosen.

Opinion points solve this problem in an elegant manner. The principle is that each person has a certain amount of "opinion points" to allot for each alternative. Higher numbers represent stronger opinions, while lower numbers represent less strong opinions. The certain degree of how

much one would like a certain alternative to be chosen, corresponds to a certain number of opinion points:

| <i>Importance</i>      | <i>Opinion Points</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Not important at all   | 1                     |
| A little bit important | 2                     |
| Important              | 3                     |
| Very important         | 4                     |
| Extremely important    | 5                     |

Let's take a look at how this voting system can benefit our group of ten anarchists. We remember that the organization was split into a majority of six people for anti-eviction, and a minority of four people for anti-war. We also recall that it wasn't really important for those who preferred anti-eviction to have their alternative chosen, but on the contrary, those who preferred anti-war would very much like to see their alternative chosen. So maybe the people would vote like this:

**Anti-eviction**

| <i>Person</i>          | <i>Importance</i>           | <i>Opinion Points</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| One                    | Not important at all        | 1                     |
| Two                    | Not important at all        | 1                     |
| Three                  | Not important at all        | 1                     |
| Four                   | Not important at all        | 1                     |
| Five                   | A little bit important      | 2                     |
| Six                    | A little bit important      | 2                     |
| Average                | Not important at all        | 1.33                  |
| <b>Collective will</b> | <b>Eight opinion points</b> | <b>8</b>              |

## Anti-war

| <i>Person</i>          | <i>Importance</i>             | <i>Opinion Points</i> |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| One                    | Important                     | 3                     |
| Two                    | Very important                | 4                     |
| Three                  | Very important                | 4                     |
| Four                   | Extremely important           | 5                     |
| Average                | Very important                | 4                     |
| <b>Collective will</b> | <b>Sixteen opinion points</b> | <b>16</b>             |

As we already knew, the people in the anti-eviction group didn't care much to have their preferred alternative chosen – the average person in this group thought it was “not important at all”, while the average person in the anti-war group thought it was “very important” to have his/her preferred alternative chosen. What we didn't know from before was that there's twice as much motivation (sixteen opinion points compared to eight opinion points) to prioritize the anti-war campaign over the anti-eviction campaign. The result is that the minority consisting of four people (whose “collective will” represents sixteen opinion points), clearly trumps the majority of six person (whose “collective will” represents eight opinion points). The reason is that the minority's “collective will” is twice that of the majority.

This was of course just a small hypothetical example with five opinion points for each person, and most of the time the majority will win nevertheless.<sup>(i)</sup> But as we saw, the majority shouldn't always win. The

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(i) How many opinion points each person has to allot, is intrinsically connected to how small/large the minority has to be, to be able to win. The higher the number of opinion points available for each person is, the smaller the minority can be.

Consider this absurd example: In a hundred person congress where each person can allot one hundred opinion points, 99 people each allot one point for a “yes”, while the one remaining person allots a hundred points for a “no” and thus trumps. Then contrast it with this example: In a hundred person congress where each person can allot only two opinion points, 67 people (i. e. 2/3rd of the constituency) each allot one point for “yes” (equaling 67 opinion points), while the remaining 33 people (i. e. almost 1/3rd of the constituency) each allot two points for a “no” (equaling 66 opinion points). In both examples the allotting of the opinion points was in the minorities most favorable situation possible, but in the first example even a small minority of one hundredth fraction could win, while in the second

goal of a referendum has to be that it should represent the voters' collective will, in the best possible way. That is not possible with conventional voting. Referendums with opinion points are thus simply more precise, and better represent the voters collective will. While the conventional voting system is a black/white, either/or system, the opinion points voting system is a colorful and nuanced system, which better reflects the colorful society we want to live in. Opinion points make people able to influence decisions that affect them, *in proportion to how much it affects them.*<sup>(i)</sup>

At the time of writing this, opinion points are an almost unknown direct-democratic tool and are thus not extensively used in anarchist organizations. That should change.

## 7. Negative Opinion Points

Not only should a proper direct-democratic referendum empower people to decide how much they like each individual alternative to be chosen, direct-democratic referendums should also empower people to decide how much they like each individual alternative *not* to be chosen.

This of course, is something that can be solved by negative opinion points.

Sometimes people don't really care what alternative is chosen at all, as long as it's not a certain alternative. For instance one can imagine a

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example a rather large minority of almost one third could not.

Negative opinion points (which is the next direct-democratic tool to be discussed), make sure that the minority can be even smaller, but still win. In a referendum with two alternatives, where the voters are polarized (i. e. where no voters stay neutral, but everybody chooses just one alternative), and each person can allot five positive opinion points for each alternative and five negative opinion points for each alternative, it's possible for a minority which encompasses one tenth of the constituency, to win.

Another thing to consider is that fewer available opinion points (such as two opinion points) naturally limits how nuanced an opinion can be expressed, and that more available opinion points (more than six) makes it hard for people to decide exactly which number to choose. That is why the number of opinion points available should be somewhere in the range between three and six. Precisely which number should be chosen is hard to ascertain, and should be discussed further by anarchists who'd like to use this method.

(i) Presuming that people who're very much affected by something will use a higher number of opinion points.

scenario of a public, political film screening where the organizers have three choices. One of the organizers doesn't know much about two of the films, so he really doesn't care which of them is chosen. Thus he might not allot any opinion points to either of these alternatives. However, he's been forced to see the third alternative a lot of times, and think it's an incredibly weak movie, in all ways. Thus he might consider allotting five negative opinion points to this particular alternative, to weaken the possibility of it being chosen.

## **Mandates**

*When it comes to referendums, one of the direct-democratic tools was "voting for motions, rather than individuals". But it's not always possible to avoid voting for a certain person. For instance, most organizations need a treasurer – which necessarily has to be a person. Usually it will be better to vote for which person should present a certain talk, rather than go through and approve a whole talk word by word. Some times it's appropriate – even strictly necessary – to vote for individuals. But people who are elected often develop into a privileged and permanent elite, which accumulates power at the expense of the constituency. To prevent this from happening, anarchists use a set of mandate related direct-democratic tools.*

## **8. Stripping of Privileges**

One of the first prerequisites for there not to develop a clique of privileged bureaucrats is naturally to strip the mandates of all privileges – both material ones and those that are related to prestige.

First we'll take a look at material privileges. If the mandate doesn't require that one do organizational work full time, the mandate holder shall not receive material goods<sup>(i)</sup> or any pay at all (other than the satisfaction of carrying out one's mandate in a good manner) – pure and simple. But if the mandate on the contrary does require a full time organizing job (in large organizations, it's a good idea to have a permanently employed secretary, who can answer inquiries), the

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(i) Material privileges can for instance be exclusive access to equipment (for instance a computer, projector, car, apartment, or similar), which limits the access for others who also need to use the equipment.

mandate holder shall not receive a better wage than the average wage of the people in the organization.

Mandates should also be stripped of immaterial privileges such as prestige. A lot of mandates are prestigious because a lot of mandates in capitalist society imply a leadership of positions,<sup>(i)</sup> and when being a leader is prestigious, mandates that imply leadership also imply prestige. This is largely avoided in anarchist organizations, simply because we don't have those kind of leaders. Another reason why mandates often come with prestige, is that there are a lot of people who'd like to get elected, and because the mandate lasts for a long time,<sup>(ii)</sup> while there is only one person that will be elected – thus the mandate is exclusive. This problem isn't relevant in anarchist organizations, because the organization is inclusive and the mandates are rotated and don't last long.

Are there even any mandates that come with prestige in anarchist organizations? I will contend yes, but only on a small scale. Who hasn't experienced situations where people start to applaud well-known personalities even before they've opened their mouth? In those situations people are applauding the person and not the content of the person's talk. That's the reason why certain anarchist organizations have forbidden applause. But that's not very reasonable, as it's first and foremost a formal decision which doesn't do much to change the underlying causes. A person can support what another person says exactly because it's this certain person that says it, and not because of what she says, independently of whether or not applause is allowed. It's the same thing with texts. Some anarchists believe there's a danger of focusing too much on the writer instead of the actual text and thus prefer anonymous writers. This works in the same way as forbidding applause. If one has succeeded in creating a genuine anarchist organization, it should be unnecessary to implement such formalities – the members should be grown up enough to discern between the cause and the

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(i) See the appendix called "The Anarchist View on Leadership" for a discussion of this term.

(ii) A trade union leader – for instance – is often a "leader" for many years. The presidents of AFL-CIO have on average had more than ten years in power.

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person.

By stripping the mandate of any form of privilege, one eliminates the opportunity for power hungry careerists to be elected to carry out a mandate. In other words, there will not be anyone who runs for mandates simply because they want the fringe benefits or prestige that's attached to the mandate (for example, many wish to be union leaders, mainly because of the high wage, good working conditions, and the exclusive prestige). One will only run for election if one wants to contribute to positive change, even though one knows that it can mean hard work, and doesn't imply any form of privilege.

### **9. Dividing Mandates**

To prevent the formation of a privileged elite, it's reasonable to start with stripping the mandate of any kind of privilege. But when power also can be seen as a privilege, it's important that the power attached also is minimized. To minimize the power of a mandate, one can divide compound mandates into separate mandates. For instance, it's possible to divide an editor mandate into culture editor, labor editor, and anti-war editor. Such divisions are often made in organizations because of practical considerations, when the work load gets too heavy. Anarchists should also make such divisions because of democratic considerations, when the "power load" gets too heavy.

### **10. Defining Mandates**

When the mandate is divided, the power attached to it is minimized. Then it's time to define the mandate – i. e. specify what the mandate holder should do and in what order she should do it, and also: what she's not supposed to do. In this way the mandate holder can be a tool for the members, and the mandate holder will have clear guidelines which simplify the work. Often the mandate holder is given a lot of tasks without the order being specified. Then it can be reasonable to grant the mandate holder a certain freedom to choose in what order to complete the tasks, but if the members think some tasks are more important than others, they have to sort these tasks into a prioritized plan of action.

## 11. Shortening Mandates

OK, so one has minimized the power of a mandate by dividing it, defining it and stripping it of any form of privilege. Now what? For the power to be distributed as equally as possible, it's important that the mandates only last for a certain period of time. This also implies that a person can't be re-elected for the same mandate time after time. In other words: the mandates have to be rotated. That way, the members are empowered by learning an array of skills – it can be to organize a conference, congress, film screening, or meeting; make a poster, a website, a movie; take notes or chair a meeting; or a thousand other tasks.

That doesn't imply that everybody can do everything. To fulfill tasks one needs knowledge and skills. Some tasks require a lot of knowledge and skills, while others don't require much at all. Those tasks that don't require much at all are easy to rotate. When a new mandate holder takes over the mandate, she learns what is needed to execute the mandate in a satisfactory manner from the previous mandate holder. For tasks that require an intermediate level of knowledge and skills, the new mandate holder might have to attend a course and spend time as an apprentice, in order to be prepared to independently execute the mandate. The period of the mandate should in such situations be somewhat longer, so the mandate holder really learns how to execute the task.

Those tasks that require a lot of knowledge and skills must be handled in another way. For instance: The task of making a complex website is something that requires several years of learning how to do it. It's the same thing with a lot of other tasks as well. In these situations it's critical that those who possess knowledge and skills make it as easy as possible for others to participate and learn. The person(s) who makes a website could for instance create a system which makes it easy to cooperate in writing and publicizing articles, to contribute with graphic design, translation, proof-reading, etc. This is a good example of something that can be specified in the mandate of someone who's elected as responsible for the organization's website (i. e. in the definition of the mandate). For tasks which require a lot of knowledge and skills one has to make the best out of the situation, but for tasks which aren't as demanding, one

can – and should – distribute the tasks to as many people as possible.

There are several ways to execute the rotation. One can elect mandate holders through ordinary elections, by rotating name, age, or another criterion, or by drawing lots.<sup>(i)</sup>

There also exist differences in both interests and skills – some are both good at and think it's pleasing to write articles, while some people think it sucks and would rather hand out agitatorials.

That is something one has to take into account. But it is also important to understand that the reason many neither have an interest for, or are skilled in certain tasks, is often lack of self-confidence. For example, speaking in front of a large group of people is something a lot of people shrink from doing. Thus it's not very strange that they're not good at it – practice makes perfect. Consequently, it's important that the anarchist organization is characterized by an encouraging and solidary spirit, so every member can develop knowledge and skills. Varying levels of interests and skills will naturally still be a reality, but a lack of self-confidence will not be the reason that different interests and skills exist.

## **12. Limiting the Number of Mandates**

To hold a mandate normally implies having power. Having several mandates at the same time will thus normally imply even greater power. That is the reason why the number of mandates to be had at the same time should be limited. To limit the number of mandates a person can have at the same time, implies more mandates to distribute amongst the rest of the members.

Something which is also important is to specify non-compatible mandates (i. e. which mandates people shouldn't have at the same time, and possibly what mandates which shouldn't even be had after each other). For instance, from a democratic point of view, it would not be good for a person to have two powerful mandates such as national

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(i) If drawing lots is chosen, one has to make a rule which says that those who've already had the mandate, can't have it one more time before each of the other possible mandate holders have had it one time each.

secretary and international secretary at the same time.

### **13. Recalling Mandates**

Even if one has done every possible thing to make sure that a mandate will be executed in an orderly and democratic way: stripped it from all sorts of privileges, divided, defined, shortened, limited the number of re-elections, limited the the number of mandates it's possible to have at the same time – as well as specified which mandates one can't have at the same time at all – the possibility that the constituency will still not be satisfied with the mandate holder's execution of the mandate remains.

Then it's an invaluable advantage that they possess the possibility to redefine – or in the worst case scenario – recall, the mandate, whenever they'd like. In a human system, it's not possible to totally eliminate human errors. The best one can do is prevent them from occurring and having ways to minimize the harm, when it occurs. So when errors occur: A treasurer uses the money of the organization to buy beer for himself, an editor censors an article she's not supposed to censor, or a congress delegate moves beyond his mandate by voting at his own discretion, it's good to have a guarantee. If the mandate is not executed in a satisfactory way, the mandate is either redefined or the mandate holder is replaced. It curbs people who're tempted to misuse the mandate, and grants the members a guarantee when the misuse is a reality.

The mandate can be instantly withdrawn, with no need to wait a long time after the harm has been done.

## ***From Theory to Practice***

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**It's extremely important to be conscious of the fact that bylaws and principles do not alone guarantee a real direct-democracy. All these tools do make up a rather good vantage point for understanding how power can be distributed and how the organization can function in the most democratic way possible. But it have to be realized in practice.**

The essence of direct-democratic processes is non-hierarchal

communication. This demands that sexist behavior be challenged by everyone; that youth speak up in an audience – even if the meeting is dominated by older people who both have a lot more knowledge and often interrupt; that a person who’s been told she is an “illegal alien” and been made to feel inferior, regards herself as an equal discussion partner and comrade. None of this can be done unless the organization is characterized by mutual encouragement and help, constructive criticism and development of self-confidence. The organization must be responsible for the development of each member’s self-confidence, knowledge and skills, in the same way that each member must be responsible for the development of the organization’s self-confidence, knowledge and skills, as such.

This is all fine, but how to transform this into an organizational approach? The answer is that the organization needs to have a direct-democratic constitution, a strategy for internal development which empowers the members, as well as a strategy for successful direct actions.

## **The Constitution**

First, the organization needs to have a direct-democratic constitution. Amongst other things it must describe the goal of the organization, how it accepts, rejects and excludes members, how the congress is organized and how to deal with mandates.<sup>(i)</sup> It’s also useful for the organization to have ready made templates for how the standard mandates should be executed (i. e. the “definition” of the mandates).

In many organizations, many members don’t know what the constitution says or how it works, and often new members aren’t used to how the congress works. That is one of several reasons it’s important to have a good strategy for internal development.

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(i) Here is one example of a direct-democratic constitution, belonging to an Irish anarcho-communist organization: <http://www.wsm.ie/story/32>

## **A Strategy for Internal Development**

The organization needs to have a strategy for internal development which aims to build each individual member's self-confidence, knowledge and skills.

To help build knowledge and reflection about political issues, the organization should offer its members a comprehensive body of workshops, meetings, seminars, movies, literature, and so on. A set of standardized study group concepts would greatly help to achieve this goal. In that way people don't have to develop a new study group – complete with speakers, material (literature, movies, etc.), meeting plan, etc. – every time they want to arrange a study group, but can instead easily take advantage of already finished and proven study group concepts. Such ready made concepts are especially important to ensure that new members quickly get a firm grasp of the theoretical foundation of anarchism, as well as understanding how the organization works (constitution, congress, mandates, etc.).

Skills are also important to develop. It's critical to continually have good workshops, in order for people to learn how to take notes, chair meetings, write articles, hold talks, design publications and so on. Ready made workshop concepts will greatly help.

## **A Strategy for Direct Action**

Both a direct-democratic constitution and a strategy for internal development are necessary components of a strategy which aims to make direct democracy reality. However, making direct democracy reality requires a lot of development of the members self-confidence, through a strategy for direct action.

Self-confidence requires that one can start to feel that one possesses actual power. If an organization doesn't have enough power to realize its demands, the members will naturally feel disempowered. Therefore, the organization needs to be able to win concrete gains. That requires a successful strategy for direct action.

Before defining direct action, we can define indirect action. An *Indirect action* is one that people not connected to the action execute, and/or make decisions on how it's going to be executed, and beg the authorities to meet their demands. On the contrary, a *direct action* is one that those who're affected themselves decide upon; they execute the action, and they force, the authorities to meet their demands.

While indirect action is characterized by *representation, begging and ineffectiveness*, direct action is characterized by *self-activity, force and effectiveness*.

There are varying levels of how direct a direct action is. The closer relationship measure and goal have, the more direct the action is. The most direct actions are those where goal and measure are the same. As an example: If the goal is a six hour work day, and the measure to achieve the goal is to go home from work after six hours, it's a very direct action, indeed.

There are a lot of different types of direct actions – some of the most well known are the strike, sabotage, blockade, and occupation.

The organization needs a direct action strategy for involvement in social movements. This strategy needs to start with simple, non-risky actions<sup>(i)</sup>, so everyone will dare to participate, and continually escalate proportionally with the organization's fighting capability. That way self-confidence is built and concrete gains are made.

As we can see, direct democracy and direct action are intrinsically connected.

## ***Direct Democracy is Effective!***

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Since anarchist organizations are living laboratories for direct

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(i) These initial actions can be as simple as a small group of workers unofficially taking a one minute longer lunch break.

democracy, we anarchists have an invaluable privilege. As opposed to socialists we don't have to talk about patience. By the steady spreading of direct democracy, we build the society we want, here and now, within the shell of the old. When this new society then begins pressing the shell of the old, the shell will crack and out of it a new society will be born.

But direct democracy is more than the joy of exploring what kinds of ways we can organize ourselves in the future, and it's more than a moral question about a distant goal of a different society. *It is also effective.*

First, when decisions really reflect the members' collective will, the motivation to put the ideas into practice is greatly heightened. Let's for instance say that the leadership of a small socialist organization want to prioritize building links with an organization that organizes war veterans who're anti-war, while the members really want to prioritize an anti-war caucus within the labor movement. If the leadership has the last word, there's a danger that the members involvement in the anti-war veteran organization will be half-hearted – and thus ineffective. If, on the contrary, the decision had reflected the members collective will, the enthusiasm for realizing the decision would've been much stronger!

Second, because direct democracy nurtures development of knowledge, skills and self-confidence, each individual anarchist can be more effective. For instance, it's easier for anarchists to speak up at the meeting of their local union and articulate alternatives which challenge reformist and authoritarian tendencies, because they're not accustomed to having a socialist leadership which does most of the talking for them.

## ***The Universal Character of Direct Democracy***

What's so genius about direct democracy is that it's a universal tool. Direct democracy is just as well suited to be utilized in militant anarchist organizations, as in workers' organizations and other social organizations, as it is to serve as the core principles of the future communist society. This implies that whatever kind of organizations and movements anarchists are involved in, they will try to influence

these to adopt direct democracy, as a tool.<sup>(i)</sup> No matter if we work in environmental organizations, women's organizations, or in single issue campaigns (such as an alliance of groups organizing to stop a military equipment fair from occurring), we spread our message of and method of direct democracy.

The decidedly most important arena to spread direct democracy is in the unions. One of the biggest obstacles to revolutionary change today, is the lack of democracy in the unions. As a result, the majority of the members are disempowered, while the privileged layer of well-paid union bureaucrats control them as if they are pawns in a game. This makes it hard to win even limited demands such as higher wages or fewer hours. If anarchists contribute to making the workers' organizations to be run by and for workers, we'll – as workers – achieve immediate material gains, and – as revolutionaries – drastically increase the possibility of a successful revolutionary revolt.

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## ***Summary & Conclusion***

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As we have seen, we can no longer build the libertarian organization with alienating tools. We need other kind of tools. These tools are the direct-democratic tools, which together form a specific, concrete toolbox, which empowers us to both effectively deconstruct the capitalist system and build a new libertarian society. But we have also seen that these tools can't be reduced to text on paper – they have to be realized in practice. In the first appendix we'll see what the anarchist view on leadership is, and how we wish to create a “leadership of ideas” without “hijacking” movements through formal leadership positions. In the second appendix, we'll also see that there are anarchists who're

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(i) The fact that we try to convince them to adopt direct democracy as a tool, doesn't necessarily imply that we wish that they adopt it as a goal. Direct democracy as a goal implies revolutionary change. Even if a worker wants to use direct democracy in the struggle to win higher wages and shorter hours, that doesn't necessarily imply that she's a revolutionary. If we demand that every organization also should adopt direct democracy as a goal, we'll be – in the best case scenario – ineffective (due to many of those who would have been a part of the organization if it hadn't been revolutionary, are excluded), and – in the worst case scenario – marginalized. If one also wants revolutionary change, there's a dedicated organization for that: the anarchist organization.

against both organization and formal democracy, and who instead prefer informal networks which utilize consensus to reach decisions. This is seldom compatible with the society we want to achieve. Our conclusion must be that we must use the tools of liberty to build the building of liberty. Similar to the way the IWW<sup>(i)</sup> puts it:

*We must build the new society  
within the shell of the old.*

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(i) IWW – Industrial Workers of the World – is an international, industrial workers' organization which shares a lot of similarities with anarcho-syndicalist workers' organizations. The organization was established in 1905 in the US, and has been an important factor in such different countries as Chile, South Africa and the US. Today the organization primarily exists in the US and the UK and has more than 1500 members. The original quote is from the preamble to their constitution.

## **Appendix I: Anarchist View on Leadership**

A lot of anarchists say they're against leadership. That's understandable. Everywhere we turn we see corrupt leaders who betray their constituency: the highly paid union bureaucrat who says he'll fight for militant unions, but blows off strikes in the decisive stage, the careerist student leader who says she'll fight for free education, but is really more concerned about having a leadership position on her CV, and the lying politician who promises peace and workers' rights before the election, but escalates support for war and crushes workers' rights after the election. Last but not least, we have the authoritarian socialist who promises freedom for all, but after the revolution butchers the revolutionaries, centralizes power and crushes all forms of resistance with raw violence. It's totally understandable that a lot of people develop a disgust for all leaders – and rightly so. But does that imply that we're against *all* types of leadership or just a *certain* type of leadership?

### **Leadership of Positions**

The answer must be that we're not against all types of leadership, but a certain kind – to be precise: *leadership of positions*. Leadership of positions is about getting “your people” into formal positions of leadership. When one has gained a sufficient number of positions one can carry out the causes one likes. To achieve a leadership of positions is a conventional strategy not only for socialists, but a lot of other ideologies, movements and organizations. Actually, it's *the* most usual strategy to gain power and to influence. But anarchists aren't against influencing other people – on the contrary, we wish to influence our fellow human beings in a libertarian and radical manner – so why are we so strongly opposed to leadership of positions?

Our answer is that we have many reasons to oppose this strategy. These reasons have as a common source in that *leadership of positions imply “the leader's” empowerment on behalf of the majority, which is pacified and disempowered.*

*First*, that is not favorable in itself. To be an active participant in one's own life is vital to self-esteem and wellbeing, and is without a doubt a necessary requirement for a communist society.

*Second*, it creates a relationship of dependency. When one is used to someone else having the knowledge and making the decisions, one is dependent upon this person. If this person is not capable of or willing to help – something we'll see very soon that a “leader” often isn't – one is left powerless.

*Third*, leadership positions often imply a lot of privileges, amongst them high wages and prestige. This makes a lot of leaders think too highly of themselves and often make them develop sleazy and arrogant tendencies. In the worst case, they earn so well that they have the same interests as our class enemies – in other words: our “leaders” become our class enemies. This is for instance true when it comes to members of the government and the most highly paid union bureaucrats, who all make an income many times that of their average constituents, often combined with a vast array of other privileges – free or very cheap travel, car, apartment, food, good pensions, prestige, good possibilities to achieve an even higher position and ownership in companies, etc.<sup>(i)</sup> Perhaps it's not that strange that union leaders and “socialist” politicians often are the most effective defenders of capital. Leadership positions *don't* necessarily come with vast material privileges, but it's more the rule than the exception.

*Fourth*, the centralization of power deprives the individual's creativity and free initiative. The members are disempowered and are not able to take care of their own affairs by themselves. On the contrary when one has more power to partake in one's own life, one will be more conscious of and will more likely see, what is needed to better the situation, and to do something about it!

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(i) The top layers of the US government all earn more than \$150,000 (remember that their base wage is only one aspect of their privileges and that most of them earn a lot more, due to contributions, stocks, etc.): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive\\_Schedule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_Schedule)

The top layers of the US trade unions have even higher base wages (averaging more than \$200,000 by 2002 numbers): <http://reform-afcio.blogspot.com/2004/01/20-top-union-leaders-averaged-223000.html>

*Fifth*, to have “leaders” is often ineffective and not tenable for winning struggles, because the “leaders” often will make decisions which don’t reflect the collective will of the members. Thus the motivation for putting their decisions into action will often be suboptimal – whether it’s about worker actions for shorter hours, protests against the government’s harassment of immigrants, or protests against the destruction of our environment. At least, the motivation will be considerably smaller than if the decisions had been the result of a direct-democratic process.

As we have observed there’s a whole array of strong reasons why we’re not proponents of a leadership of positions. To gain leadership positions *within a capitalist framework* will only contribute to this framework’s solidity.

Still, it has to be pinpointed that we can’t reject positions *as such*. In our own organizations we do have all kinds of different positions (for instance web editor, treasurer, reporter, etc.). The difference is that these positions – or more precisely *mandates* – are subject to the members’ direct-democratic control, through the tools we have discussed, and thus cannot be misused in the same way that capitalist leadership positions can be.

## **Leadership of ideology**

OK. So we’re obviously against *leadership of positions*. But if we’re not against leadership as such, what kind of leadership is compatible with anarchist ideology? The answer is *leadership of ideology*.

When anarchists are at their best, they’re united in a solid, strongly motivated and fighting working class organization – not a loose collection of insular discussion societies who talk about abstract philosophy. We wish for a new society. This requires extensive changes in the way people think – something we can help to bring about by spreading anarchist ideology. But as we have seen, our tools are

intrinsically connected to our goal. If we're serious about achieving a libertarian, direct-democratic society, we can't run for elections of leadership positions in order to use the positions to force through decisions which the members might not even want. The reason is that we genuinely think that any form of liberation must start with the oppressed themselves: *The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself.* But until a person realizes that she or he is oppressed – and perhaps more important: has visions of the kind of alternative that exists, and belief in its feasibility – the oppressed will stay oppressed.

Of course, there are oppressed people who have a clear understanding of being oppressed, and they develop alternative ways to organize themselves and their surroundings, as well as self-confidence and initiative, on their own. But it is not given. To confirm this is not more difficult than talking with friends, taking a look in the newspaper or out the window. Thus we spread our ideology, so we can show what's really worth fighting for, and share our experience of struggle, for our common good. If we don't try to convince our fellow human beings, our theories serve no purpose – it becomes theory for theory's sake. We would just be a small group of people who know about and have a lot of opinions on how the class struggle should be fought, but don't do anything about it. It would be just as pathetic as a group of inventors who discovers a cure for cancer, but don't even mention that such a cure exists – then, they're irrelevant and people will still die of cancer! By spreading our ideas through publications, meetings and agitation – and not least by showing how direct democracy and direct action work *in practice*, we can win more of our common human beings to the ideology of freedom: anarchism. A united people can once and for all make an end to the societal pest that is called capitalism.

## ***Appendix II: Network Organization, Consensus & Hidden Power***

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**As long as they've existed, both anarchism and socialism have been misunderstood phenomenas. This is partly due to respectively theoretical insufficiencies, the ruling class' propaganda, the resignation oppression brings, and the socialization to the everyday life in a capitalist society.**

**One of the misunderstandings of anarchism is that anarchists don't acknowledge power relationships, and are thus incapable of dealing with and fighting the power.**

### **The Historical Backdrop**

The anarchist movement and thus anarchist theory haven't been static phenomenas, but have gone through waves. In the infancy of capitalism radical ideologies were on the rise. But when the Paris Commune was crushed in 1871 and the national states held a tight grip on the movements, the anarchist movement suffered a severe backlash.

At the start of the twentieth century, anarchism was revitalized by a new theory – anarcho-sindicalism – and a new movement emerged. This movement was brutally crushed, and in the middle of the twenties only debris remained.

In 1936 there was an anarchist inspired workers' revolution in Spain. Also this revolution was crushed, followed by years of fascism, World War Two, and generally little anarchist activity internationally.

In the end of the sixties and the start of the seventies the movement once again emerged – and also this time – in a new edition. The global recovery of social struggles in the sixties and seventies was characterized by a whole array of different movements: the anti-racist movement (the “civil rights movement”), women's movement, gay movement, peace

movement and environmental movement. Socialists were often inspired by “third world socialism.”<sup>(i)</sup>

Several of these movements – most prominently the women’s movement, environmental movement and parts of the peace movement – saw how parliamentary democracy and its leaders made promise after promise, which they broke as soon as they came to power. In the network model and the consensus process they discovered an alternative to formal positions of leadership and referendums.

A lot of the anarchists – who participated in these struggles – were inspired, and started to adopt the new organizational model.

These social movements declined and in the eighties were replaced by offensives of the ruling class. The offensives continue still, and go by the name “neo-liberalism”.

The new anarchist movement which was influenced by the ideas of consensus in the sixties and seventies, was in the eighties characterized by punk rockers, environmentalists and new age ideas. Also a lot of these adopted the concept of network organizing and consensus.

Last, but not least: At the end of 1999, the anarchist movement was once again revitalized. Tens of thousands of activists managed to sabotage the party of some of the worlds most powerful men, by stopping the World Trade Organization’s top meeting in Seattle. The event took the world by storm and got known for its highly effective network organizing – a decentralized network of networks which used consensus to reach decisions, and which often gathered in militant black-clad sections (the so-called “black blocs”) in the demonstrations.<sup>(ii)</sup>

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(i) “Third world socialism” is a term used to describe self proclaimed socialist movements – typically characterized by guerrilla struggle in rural societies – in the third world. Most known are Castro’s Cuba, Ho-Chi-Min’s Vietnam and Mao’s China.

(ii) Not everybody organized themselves into networks and utilized consensus, but the event was nevertheless known for this.

Today, more formal organizational models are gaining ground,<sup>(i)</sup> but many of those who call themselves anarchists are still proponents of network organizing and consensus. Therefore it can be fruitful to take a further look at what network organizing and consensus really implies. Not least, it can be interesting to see if this is a good alternative to formal direct-democratic organizations, and what these two organizational approaches might learn from each other.

## **What does Network Organizing and Consensus Really Mean?**

*Network organizing* implies that groups cooperate in decentralized networks. These networks often consist of a lot of different smaller and tighter “affinity groups”, which have sporadic contact with each other. The movement doesn’t have an uniform ideology, but consists of a lot of affinity groups which again often consist of either environmentalists, militant anti-fascists and “lifestyle anarchists”<sup>(ii)</sup>, or a mix of these.

*Consensus* is a method such networks utilize to reach decisions. Consensus literally means to reach agreement. And nothing is better than that! But what happens when one *doesn’t* reach agreement? Then, either the minority can: 1.) opt out and signal that it doesn’t wish to stop the process, even though they disagree with the decision; or alternatively 2.) use their right to block the decision.

The most important advantages are allegedly that these two complementary concepts together – decentralized networks and consensus – prevent centralization of power, are flexible, and prevent

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(i) When the optimism and hope – and consequently a huge part of the anti-capitalist movement – declined after September 11th 2001, the more strategic and serious alternatives were able to keep on going. One of these alternatives is a pro-organizational and class struggle oriented anarcho-communist tendency, which is known as “platformist” (after “The Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists” from 1926). Also other anarchist groups either ceased to exist or formed more formal structures.

(ii) Here used as a term for those who “buy” themselves acceptance in a sub-cultural milieu, with peculiar codes such as black clothes, punk music, vegan food, etc. Naturally, there’s nothing wrong in looking how one likes to, but looks are not a good way to effectively fight capitalism, and in principle have nothing to do with anarchism as such.

infiltration and repression from the state apparatus.

## **Intangible Power Structures and Leadership Cultures**

At first sight network organizing and consensus doesn't necessarily look bad. But when we study this pair a bit closer, we find that it's not particularly well suited to build an anarchist mass movement.<sup>(i)</sup> Let's first take a further look at decentralized networks:

Power relations and networks exist anyway. Some will have more time and money to use on organizing, have more contacts, be more used to and better to talk in front of many people, as well as writing articles and pamphlets, and last, but not least: *somebody will make the decisions.*

What one have to decide upon is whether these power relationships and networks shall be *formal* or *informal*. As the feminist Jo Freeman wrote in her classic *Tyranny of Structureless*:

*We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group; only whether or not to have a **formally** structured one.*

This is something a lot of proponents of consensus are not conscious of. They truly believe that when they consciously decide not to create positions of power – and consequently no one to fill them – the power disappears. This has certain similarities to a child who is scared by a clown, closes her eyes, and hides behind her own hands, thinking that the clown has gone away. In the same way, power is not gone, just because one closes one's eyes before it. Some will still make decisions. What is gone is the possibility to democratically delegate and rotate the power positions:

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(i) It's important to note that the following critique of network organizing and consensus is directed to the use in organizations of a certain size – we will discuss smaller groups a bit later.

*If the movement continues deliberately not to select who shall exercise power, it does not thereby abolish power. All it does is abdicate the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it.*

This is the reason why so-called decentralized networks have a tendency to create intangible power structures. Usually this also comes with an unfavorable worship of personalities. Those who know most, and not least talk loudest and have the most self-confidence, have even bigger possibilities to accumulate power than they have in formal direct-democratic organizations. The hypothesis that decentralized networks prevents centralization of power is thus wrong.

Not only does the network model veil the power, it also makes it intangible and thus unassailable. Coupled with consensus it also makes sure that its anti-democratic aspect is further amplified, at the same time as it makes the organization maximally ineffective.

To opt out is equivalent to the majority getting it their way, while the minority probably won't go through with what the majority has agreed upon, and one loses a great deal of the power of being organized – namely concerted action. To opt out is thus highly ineffective.

But the other possibility – that a minority blocks a majority decision – is much worse. First, it's not a practical possibility. If the majority feels strongly enough about a certain decision, they'll implement it even if a small minority tries to block it. If a small group of four people try to block an organization of five thousand from supporting a certain strike, a lot is required for this enormous majority to have bigger sympathies for consensus than concrete class struggle. The reason is that it goes against the members' collective will and is fundamentally anti-democratic. This is in itself a good enough reason to reject consensus as a generally good way of reaching decisions.

Second, a lot of guts is required to block a decision. There's a huge probability that those who already have sufficient self-confidence (and

may I add: are arrogant enough) will block decisions more often than those who don't. As opposed to speaking in front of a large audience, writing an article, etc., it'll be hard – or even absurd – to create workshop groups to actively support people from blocking decisions. Instead of these people being able to express their concern through a vote<sup>(i)</sup>, they often end up as a marginalized group which seemingly always consents.

It's true that network organizing and consensus prevents centralization of power. But what about the other hypothesis: that it's flexible? Put mildly, that is up for discussion. What on earth is flexible about enabling a small minority to block decisions, so they have to be discussed once again? The answer must be that it's not flexible, but rather inflexible.

The last advantage of the network model is allegedly that it prevents infiltration and repression from the state apparatus. At least this is true. But it's not an advantage this model has over formal, direct-democratic organizations. There it'll also be really hard for the agents of the state to consolidate themselves in power position, because there only exist a lot of different mandates which don't have a lot of power attached, and which moreover are rotated.

Another way network organizations prevents infiltration and repression, is simply by seldom growing large and powerful enough to warrant the state to prioritize considerable resources to undermine them – something which hardly can be regarded as an advantage.

All these reasons – and especially the fact that it's anti-democratic – implies that every consistent anarchist also should be a consistent opponent of using the network model as our most important way to organize, and consistent opponent of consensus as our primary way of reaching decisions.

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(i) Remember that minorities who feel strongly about an issue (so strongly they'd like to block it, if they're in an organization that uses consensus), can be empowered to express just how much they object to a certain motion, by allotting negative opinion points. Opinion points are thus a good tool for strongly opinioned minorities, but in order to block a motion the minority have to constitute *at least* 1/10th of the voters (if each person can allot five opinion points).

## Can Consensus be Useful in Any Situations?

I've now used a whole section to show how anti-democratic and ineffective both network organizing and consensus are in larger groups (and if we're ever to have any chance to influence our class in a libertarian and radical fashion, we have to make really big organizations). But are there situations where such an organizational model still can be useful – even though it's not suitable as our primary way of organizing and reaching decisions? I would say yes. In smaller groups (at least smaller than 15-20 people), where everybody know each other well and trust each other, consensus will often be favorable. Not only will it be favorable, consensus will often be a natural and effective form of cooperation (though there's no need to ideologize this, as is often done in network organizations). How often is it really necessary to organize referendums in one's circle of friends?

Let's say that a tightly knit circle of six friends have decided to go to the cinema. Five of them want to see *Land and Freedom*, but one is vehemently opposed to seeing that movie, because she's already seen it. Then it's a big probability that they reach an agreement and go to another movie. And if it's really important for these five to watch *Land and Freedom* that particular day, they do so. Why should a political situation be different? *It's not necessary to make it more difficult than what it really is.*

As we have observed, consensus can be useful in smaller groups, but as soon as the group is big enough, consensus has lost its role as the most important way to reach decisions.

### The Anarchist Alternative

Even though network organizing sometimes is useful, it's a *supplement* – not a replacement – for formal organizations, which both can be more effective and more democratic.

An anarchist can surely participate in a demonstration together with the circle of friends which primarily consists of socialists and environmentalists – her affinity group. Each individual “member” of the group also has other political friends who together form an affinity

group. This way our anarchist has a network she can be engaged in, independently of the anarchist organization she's a member of.

But even though she can be involved in similar milieus and actions, as she likes, it doesn't replace the need to also be a member of a more formally structured organization. As an anarchist she has interest of being organized together with other anarchists, in order to maximize influence.

Let's say – for instance – there's a big anti-war demonstration, where we know that a lot of those attending will see the most important step toward ending the war, is replacing a republican president with a democratic president. Then maybe the anarchists choose to print fliers which argue that a “democrat VS republican” is a rather irrelevant question, and instead encourage to build support for a large anti-war strike. Then our anarchist can maximize her influence. Instead of discussing how to print a few black and white fliers with her affinity group (if they're all anarchists), she can hand out lots of nice and colorful ones (due to economies of scale, which larger organizations have). If she gets to know people who seem to be interested in anarchism, but live in a totally different place, she can put the interested people into contact with other anarchists where they live.

Of course, she could've put an interested person into contact with a similar affinity group, but it's not certain that they'd have the same politics as her, but a local of her organization would – because the politics have been decided upon through a direct-democratic process.

To be a member of a larger and more formally organized anarchist organization, makes it possible to benefit from common resources and concerted action, in a way that's not possible by only being a member of an affinity group which again is a member of a larger network.

## Summing Up

The combination of network organizing and consensus developed in different milieus in the sixties and seventies as a reaction to conventional bourgeois ways of organizing and conducting democratic processes. These movements influenced anarchists – often of the loosely defined type which is a part of anarchist sub-cultures – and continue to influence a lot of people today. We have seen that networks can be useful, but that they don't replace the need for more formal organizations. We have also seen how consensus advances hidden hierarchies and power relations, as soon as the groups grow a bit bigger, but that it can be useful for smaller, more tightly knit groups.

As Jo Freeman wrote:

*We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group; only whether or not to have a **formally** structured one. (...) Informal structures have no obligation to be responsible to the group at large. Their power was not given to them; it cannot be taken away.*

In direct-democratic organizations it can.

# Questions

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## ***Theory & Practice***

- ❁ Do you believe an anarchist organization can be run as a direct democracy? Why? Why not?
- ❁ How do we make sure that direct democracy moves from being a dead set of principles to a living culture?
- ❁ Whose responsibility is it that the organization's direct democracy is maintained? Does anyone have special responsibilities to make sure it's maintained?

## ***Direct Democracy in Everyday Life***

- ❁ How can we start pushing the locals of our unions to be run as direct democracies? What consequences – if any – would it have?
- ❁ Can the education institution, workplace, and local community you're a part of be run as direct democracies? How?
- ❁ How can we best spread the notion of direct democracy? By theoretical propaganda, workshops, showing how it works in practice? Or all of these perhaps? More suggestions?

## ***Opinion Points***

- ❁ Discuss if and how often you feel there should've been an option which lets you express how strongly you feel about each alternative.
- ❁ What can prevent a caucus from always using the maximum number of points – even though they don't necessarily think it's extremely important – just to maximize their influence? Would it even matter if they did?
- ❁ Discuss whether or not opinion points are something that's important enough to be a matter of course in anarchist organizations?

## ***Direct Democracy VS Representative Democracy***

- ❁ What is the most important difference between direct democracy and so-called representative democracy?
- ❁ Try to find arguments for why representative democracy is effective, or perhaps ineffective. Then try to find arguments for why direct

democracy is effective, or perhaps ineffective. Discuss which situations and for *who* these two types of concepts are effective for.

- ❁ A tendency in workers' councils – such as in the Russian and the German revolutions – was to vote for which party candidates would lead the councils. How should anarchists relate to such situations?

### ***Leadership***

- ❁ What is the primary differences between a “leadership of ideas” and a “leadership of positions”?
- ❁ Do anarchists need leaders? If no, why not? If yes, how and what kind of leaders?
- ❁ There are a quite a few direct-democratic tools dedicated to prevent the development of mandate holders into a privileged elite. Which tools are these and how do they help?

### ***Consensus***

- ❁ What are the most important characteristics of respectively consensus and direct democracy and how do they differ?
- ❁ Can network organizing and consensus be supplements to formal organizing and direct democracy, or are these opposed to each other?
- ❁ How can the members best control those who have power (for instance those who have a lot of skills or hold mandates)? By consensus or direct democracy?

### ***Prefigurativity***

- ❁ Discuss how the direct democracy of the future communist society will differ from the direct democracy we can implement in our own organizations here and now.
- ❁ What limitations are there for workers' organizations who wish to utilize direct democracy within today's society?
- ❁ Will there be differences in how an anarchist organization, a workers' organization, and a community organization utilize direct democracy? And if so: What kind of differences and why?

All movements for revolutionary change have hitherto been defeated.

Can one of the reasons be that they ended up reproducing the same kind of authoritarian relationships they wanted to defeat?

In that case: How can we avoid this by best try to reflect the future we wish for, in our present work?

“The Prefigurative Organization” takes a fresh view on direct democracy: It carefully explains what tools – some well-known and well-used, other novel and only slightly experimented with – organizations will need to become direct democracies; It outlines a strategy to put these ideas into practice; and it challenges the reader to go beyond conventional thinking on what democracy is all about.

On top of all of this, consensus is discussed, as well as the anarchist view on leadership.