

At the third North American Class Struggle Anarchist Conference, Miami Autonomy and Solidarity gave a presentation on what they call the Intermediate Level. This document collects the notes from the presentation & related readings. With one exception, all of the material here can be found online.

These pieces are all worth reading entirely. People could also focus on specific sections of some of the pieces - the "Intermediate Level" section of Scott Nappalos's article, the "Grouping of Tendency" section of the FARJ article, the "Socio-political Organization" section of the article by Jose Antonio Gutierrez, the "Industrial Network" section of the article by DAM, the "Network of Militants" section of the Solidarity Federation article, and the "Tendency Organization" section of Liberty and Solidarity's article.

For related online discussions of these proposals, see also:
MAS Intermediate Level CSAC Presentation Notes, Readings and Discussion
<http://www.anarchistblackcat.org/index.php/topic,7469.0.html>

Platformism/Especifismo and Initiating Social Movements
<http://www.anarchistblackcat.org/index.php/topic,6550>

Platformism & Front Organizations
<http://www.anarchistblackcat.org/index.php/topic,7295>

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Miami Autonomy and Solidarity: Intermediate Level as the Strategic Focus for Organizations of our Tendency in this Time

<http://www.anarchistblackcat.org/index.php/topic.7469.0.html>

Nature of the Period:

- low level of mass struggle
- non-existent or bureaucratized mass organizations (NGO and Collaborationist Unions)
- low level of revolutionary consciousness
- disconnect of influence between revolutionary organizations and mass struggle

Objectives:

- Revolution by the popular classes organized in the popular mass movements
- Primary goal of revolutionary organizations in the short, medium and long term is to contribute to an autonomous, self-managed, libertarian and revolutionary consciousness, capacity and power of these movements to create revolution in the long-term.

Proposal: The Intermediate Level can be a common strategic intervention of revolutionary level militants to contribute to this.

What are the levels?

- the levels are enclosed within each other like “concentric circles” as the FARJ calls it
- each the level exists regardless of whether there’s an organization (or various organizations) attempting to unify that level
- the levels are theoretical concepts to help us strategize around our activity with some grey area in practice; but the concepts are still useful in developing strategy to promote our objectives

The Mass Level

- the mass level is the broadest level and includes all people of the popular classes regardless of level of commitment to struggle, or ideological persuasion.
- Mass level organizations are open to all people within a given sector in the mass level. For example, at a workplace, the mass level organization would be a broad union of all workers at this workplace; in the community, a mass level organization would be a tenants union
- Theoretically, mass has less to do with numbers and more to do with degree of openness to people of different politics, ideas and commitment levels to struggle. It’s the most open level
- The mass level organization at this time by default addresses short-term needs and concerns of those at the mass level

The Intermediate Level

- the intermediate level includes militants, organizers, and activists of various

ideological persuasions within the mass level

- different intermediate level concepts have been theorized: “grouping of tendency”, “network of militants”, “industrial networks”, “socio-political organization”, “front”, “rank-and-file network”
- an intermediate level organization groups people more committed to struggle and unifying around a set of basic objectives that their members would like to promote at the mass level or within the mass organization: greater participation, direct collective action, directly democratic decision-making, autonomous base level horizontal power, fighting oppression & prejudice that causes division at the mass level
- There could be multiple intermediate level groupings or organizations within a mass organization promoting different tendencies within the mass level
- If the mass level is defined more by short-term objectives, the intermediate level could be defined more by pursuing short-term objectives as well as medium term objectives: developing the mass level organization to achieve the medium term objectives identified by the organization

The Revolutionary Level

- the revolutionary level are intermediate level militants also within the mass level that are united around a common ideological and strategic view who desire revolutionary transformation and act to promote that
- the revolutionary level involves the highest level of commitment, the highest level of unity and the longest term objectives
- the revolutionary level can include various tendencies with different visions organized into separate revolutionary organizations pursuing short and medium term objectives that will build towards long-term revolutionary transformation
- some revolutionary level militants of one organization might unify with other revolutionary level militants of another organization in an intermediate level organization with intermediate level militants unaffiliated with any revolutionary level organization to promote common short and medium term objectives though their long-term their revolutionary objectives might differ

Why the intermediate level strategic focus for our revolutionary level tendency at this time?

- Disconnect between the long-term and short-term: the intermediate level helps bridge the gap by providing medium-term objectives that our revolutionary level militants can engage
- Building connections with other organizers, activists and militants broadens our dialogue and acts as WSM argues- as a “force multiplier” for our action increasing our effectiveness and challenging our ideas in practice
- With the low level of activity, autonomy and consciousness at the mass level it provides an autonomous force with which to build a mass level organization or activate mass level organizations that are captured by bureaucratic and collaborationist elements
- In this process, though arguing and organizing for the mass level towards more of the medium and eventually long-term goals is the objective, the organizers, activists and militants that we meet and learn together in struggle from might come to enough unity

with us to where they decided to join our revolutionary organization

Strategic Concepts & Considerations

- we believe that the popular class mass movements will make the revolution, so for revolutionary organization, connection to and engagement with the mass level is primary in pursuing our revolutionary objectives
- the intermediate level and the revolutionary level are meaningless without mass level connection and participation
- the levels are historically based and can shift in consciousness, capacity and commitment: the mass level needs to be at or close to the revolutionary level for there to be the possibility of libertarian revolution
- we should not confuse the intermediate level for the mass level
- we should not confuse -as Joseph Kay from Sol Fed argues- “massification” (collective empowerment and participation) for “mobilization”
- we should not confuse expression of some idealized militancy or image of “being revolutionary” for strategic praxis that actually has the potential to contributing towards, short, medium and long-term objectives that can lead to revolutionary change. It’s about effect, not expression.
- I to M means engaging intermediate level activists and organizers not engaged in mass level struggle in mass level struggle to organize for “massification”
- M to I means working with co-workers, neighbors, fellow students, etc. at the mass level to engage them to join or co-develop intermediate level tendencies or organizations
- For MAS, M to I is primary because it’s likely to be the most grounded and enable us to engage in mass level contact and organizing
- Though I to M is still important and should not be ignored when opportunities arise

One example: workers network (M to I within a mass level organization)

- participation in union (rallies, meetings, pickets, protests), with little room to participate or contribute to the union due to bureaucratization and collaborationism
- identified key militants and dialogued over months about the need for our own autonomous tendency and network
- struggle at mass level arised with participation in informal intermediate level action not sactioned and actively condemned by the union
- developed contacts from these militants and joined with other militants at workplace to form an intermediate level organization
- role of intermediate level organization to strengthen our direct action, combative, non-electoral, non-legalistic tendency within the mass organization (our union) and mass level in general (folks working in our industry not identified with the union) autonomous from though participating in the union.

Another example: the Jamaica Plain Neighbors Against Gentrification (I to M with little mass level struggle)

- organized a small grouping of activists, organizers and militants around developments and gentrification issues around common short-term and medium-term objectives
- utilized the organization to develop mass level struggle on the issue in a 3 year

winning campaign for affordable housing rather than luxury housing in our neighborhood
- problem: failed to develop enough mass level contacts to build on the gains of the struggle and continue with a stronger intermediate level force for the future; though some of contacts worked with us in the anti-eviction organizing at the beginning of the foreclosure crisis

Clarifying Questions?

Open Up to Broader Dialogue:

- Agreements or Disagreements with the Proposal?
- Experiences and Insights with intermediate level organizations and tendencies?
- Ideas for the development of these strategic concepts?
- Collaboration possibilities around such formations?
- Other thoughts?

Defining Practice: the intermediate level of organization and struggle

By Scott Nappalos

<http://anarkismo.net/article/16350>

There is a left tradition of thinking about and taking action within two realms of activity: the mass level and the revolutionary political level. There are different ways to cash out these concepts, but they are distinguished basically by levels of unity and content. The mass level is where people come together based on common interests to take action in some form, with unions being the most obvious and traditional example. A higher level of unity is the revolutionary political level where people take action based on common ideas and practices. These concepts are tools or instruments that can help us make sense of the world, and better act to change it. In so far as they do that, they work. If they don't, we get new ones. At the level of reality, this division is not so clear and in fact we see mixtures of unity and action everywhere. That being said, these concepts help us parse out how as revolutionaries we can relate to social groupings, and how we can intervene.

There is an additional level though that can help us in this manner, the intermediate level. As opposed to the political level, which is defined by attempted unity of ideas, and the mass level, which is defined by common practices with diversity of ideas, the intermediate level shares some features of both. The intermediate level is where people organize based on some basic level of unity of ideas to develop and coordinate their activity at the mass level.

Taking the example of the workers movement, we see unions at the mass level grouped together by common workplace issues, and a political level of revolutionary militants with unified ideology acting within the unions in some way or another. Within the unions there can be a plurality of political organizations, and even of individual militants who lack organizations. An intermediate level organization could come to unite class conscious workers around a strategy within their industry, workplace, etc. The intermediate level organization would not have the unity of a political organization, since its basis is bringing together militants for a common practice that doesn't require everyone having the same ideology and political program. Likewise, if we required every member in a mass organization to share a high level of class consciousness and militancy (independently of the ebb and flow of struggles), we would be doomed either to fractions or paper tigers.

There is also a distinction between levels and organizations. That is there's a mass level before the mass organization. The mass organization is made up of people who come together around common interests. That means there are people with common interests who exist before they come together in the mass organization. Often there is mass level activity and organizing (like spontaneous struggles, informal work groups, etc), before there is mass organization. There's also a revolutionary (or at least leftist) level before the revolutionary organization - there are people with ideas and actions who exist before they come together into a conscious revolutionary body.

Likewise with the intermediate level, there are individuals and activities that precede organization. Presently there are organizations that sometimes play the role of intermediate organization (unconsciously), and there is prefigurative organizing and tendencies of potential future intermediate organizations. I want to hazard a thesis; in the United States today the intermediate level is the most important site for revolutionaries. In fact, I think this is true beyond the United States, but I lack the space here to prove it, and will leave it up to others in other places.

The intermediate level is strategic at this time is due to the state of political and mass organizations. The revolutionary left has been isolated from the working class (as well as other oppressed classes) for at least decades. The left is largely derived from the student and sub-cultural movements which serve as a training ground for the various institutional left bureaucracies (NGOs, unions, lobbying groups, political parties, sections of academia, etc), or at the least these institutions remain dominant within the left. The left reflects a particular section of society, one that sets it apart from the working class in its activity, vision, and makeup. There's an inertia of dyspraxia; the ideas the left espouses do not reflect the activity of the left. Whether this is from the black block to the so-revolutionaries working to elect the left wing of capital, the left is characterized at this time by an alienation from the working class rather than an ability to "act in its interest".

On the other side the mass movements are dominated by those same forces that the left breeds in, the institutionalized bureaucracies which are integrated into capitalism. Few if any mass movements exist where the working class has collective engagement and leadership, and bring collective activity to bare down on capital. The mass movements alone don't have any guarantees. Workers have their own ideas and logic, some of which can be liberatory and others of which can be reactionary (and everything in between). Both spontaneity and vanguardism are fundamentally flawed ways of looking at the world. While the mass movements ultimately have the power to transform society, the opposite may be true as well (they can become reactionary defenders of capitalism, or worse put forward reactionary radical politics). Nor is the left immune from all same forces that threaten the mass movements, in fact the official or institutional left's track record is worse. Generally the left has been behind the masses in times of upheaval, and often in the role of repressing these movements.

Nature, transformation, and struggle

Historically, there's a syllogism on the libertarian left about unions that reflects the division between the mass and political levels. The syllogism is some variant of this:

1. A union is organized by people to improve working conditions
2. In order for it to make good on their demands, the unions have to bring together large enough groups to be effective.
3. If workers must be anarchists/revolutionaries/communists before they join then either:
 - a. It would be unnecessary since the workers are already revolutionary, and could just launch a revolution. The union would just be a duplicate of a political organization. (or)
 - b. The members would merely be anarchists/revolutionaries/communists on paper.

Another variant:

1. Trade unions exist to win better working conditions
2. An organized working class creates antagonism with a better funded and organized capitalists class
3. Either trade unions:
 - a. Retain their militancy, and are attacked without restraint
 - i. Thereby rendering them less/ineffective at winning gains
 - b. Or they can attempt class collaboration, and (sometimes) wins ground
 - i. This integrates unions into capitalism, and creates a union bureaucracy with interests separated from the workers
 - ii. The union has an interest in maintaining capitalism, and therefore becomes reactionary.

The conclusions of these lines of thought vary, but they share some things in common. This orientation puts forward an ahistorical and overly schematic conception of the mass and political level. The implications of these theories are that either this is how things are or how they should be. The conclusion is that we should either try to convince mass movements to avoid politicization or that we should recognize their inability to do so and diverge from them. The upshot of these lines of thought tend to orient us towards the mass and political level in ways that make us unprepared for the ways in which movements change across time and constitute themselves.

The history of the workers movement is quite different from the arguments above. Rather than seeing very clear cut divisions either between revolutionary political organizations and very general mass unions (or between collaborationist and militant unions), we see every possible permutation. That is to be expected, however the above arguments try to argue against mixing mass and political, saying it's a witches brew that will yield only failure. It's an argument about the nature or essence of mass and political, which then tries to change real mass organizations and political organizations in relation to their supposed nature.

The problem is that these organizations are not static, they change. They also do not change on a whim, but there are distinct ebbs and flows of struggle. When the struggle is pitched and society (or at least some section of it) erupts into resistance, we can see mass organizations become politicized, and workers can be radicalized (or become radicalized towards fascistic tendencies). Likewise political organization can take on mass characteristics. In low points of struggle however politicized workers organization have a difficult time acting as a mass organization (though they try!), and mass organizations can tend towards domination by class collaborationism and bureaucratic parasitism.

While too general to say anything systematic, this is a fundamental insight. The nature of struggle is not static, but changes with the rise and fall of resistance. Now, this doesn't negate that you can see militant radical mass movements in times when other struggles are absent (perhaps the MST in Brazil during some periods is a good example, or the

underground CNT under Franco), but we should expect that the scope of these struggles will be limited, and that we need another orientation other than expecting them to grow step-by-step linearly. How people organize themselves changes alongside this. That being said, I will mention only in passing that I don't think either the mass organization alone or the political organization are sufficient to bring down capitalism and create a new society. Both the experiences of party dictatorship in the soviet states, and the failures of syndicalism in Spain and elsewhere provide some data about the limitations of rigidly adhering to organizational forms as vehicles of liberation.

Struggle itself can be transformative, both of people and of levels and organizations. People at the mass level come together in organization to fight, and can transform their consciousness through those struggles. The mass organization itself may change then, and intermediate and political organizations may evolve from those struggles. The political level may build mass organization, or intermediate organization consolidates into political organization. Ultimately the mass level is the lifeblood of all struggles. Without the mass level, the intermediate and political levels are merely chasing winds. If we recognize this dynamic, that people are transformed in struggle and organizations can be built through these transformations, it helps rupture these rigid conceptions of the separations of the political and mass organization, the dominance of the political organization, or fetishized forms of the mass revolutionary organization.

In our time, the alienation of the left from struggle has created a kind of abstract obsession with either structures or ideas. An intellectual and often political sect driven tendency focuses solely on political content, in terms of trying to convince, debate, win, or propagate revolutionary ideas irrespective of the form they take, their embodiment in struggle, etc. An activist tendency tends towards an obsession with form and structure (assemblies, councils, unions, etc), and usually merely formal democracy, as being inherently revolutionary irrespective of the content and ideas of the people inside the structure, or even its direction. The content of struggles is however crucial. Formal democracy with a racist working class could yield a radical democratic fascism for example. We want to see a lived democracy, which can't be guaranteed by structures alone, and ultimately we need a democracy with a certain content, anarchist communist content. This means we should seek out and strengthen struggles that develop that content in the struggle, which is different from getting people to verbalize radical ideas.

Synthesizing these two features of organization in society brings into focus the role of the intermediate level. At the present time, we live in a low point of struggle in the United States. Today mass organization is either spread out and localized, repressed, or co-opted. Political organization is generally isolated and deformed, while capital is unleashing massive restructuring, discipline, and rationalization. The two options usually presented have been to unreflectively build mass movements, or to build political organizations (sometimes to build them alongside or within the mass movements). At the level of mass struggle, it's worth saying that organizing is incredibly difficult, and the strength and repression of capital alone is the greatest threat. However the potential of capital to incorporate and utilize repressive measures on struggle through the mass movements is poorly understood and unappreciated on the left (especially since the level of struggle is

low anyhow). On the revolutionary political side we have isolation manifested in its spontaneist, insurrectionary, or intellectual forms. More secondarily there are attempts to build political organization out of the mass movements which generally don't exist or are organized against political organization. It becomes a chicken or the egg sort of game, we lack the struggle to rupture the stasis of the mass movements, but we lack the mass movements to generate the struggle. It is not possible to will into existence militant class conscious mass movements, nor is it responsible to sit on one's hands waiting for it to occur.

During low points of struggle then, the intermediate level presents an alternative. While we may not be able to sustain radical mass organization at all times, we can bring together the most conscious elements of the mass movements together with the most active and grounded elements of the revolutionary movements to provide continuity, organization, coordination, and education between struggles. The intermediate level organization then is the memory, training ground, and nursery of developing consciousness in struggle, which is not possible within the ebb and flows with the mass movements, and which has different activity and unity from the political level. Unlike the mass movements, the intermediate level does not seek to become the vehicle for mediation between capital and the working class, and because of this it has space for activity and development that the mass movement can not. That said, in practice the intermediate level should arise from and remain directly bound to the mass level. The intermediate level gets its vitality and strength from the lessons, challenges, and strength of the struggle, and maintains its unity through that fight. Abstract coalitions of self-identified leftists wanting to do things at the mass level is a recipe for dead end reading groups more than anything else.

The Intermediate Level Already Exists In Struggle

Concretely this alternative already presents itself in practice for those who are organizing. For example take struggles within the unions for greater militancy and democracy. Often these struggles take the form of union elections, coordinated activity in union meetings, and sometimes actions. For the workers organizing these actions (whatever their merits), there are a number of challenges to overcome. First there is the space to hold meetings where strategy and tactics can be discussed, assessments of the organizing, and also space to bring contacts for one-on-one discussions, or even larger mass meetings. While this is true of physical space, it is also true in terms of skills, abilities, and materials. Workers need some level of pooling of resources to train each other, maintain systematic organization, pass on lessons of struggle, and develop their vision of direction. This requires a level of organization that the boss will be hostile to, and the union being challenged is also likely to oppose. There are other points to consider. If the group wins the struggle, often the organization leading up to the fight is incorporated into the existing bureaucracy, dissolves itself, or is attacked. Yet all the same problems resurface down the line as the winds change, and the rank and file find themselves embattled again. The intermediate level organization is that space that allows militants the coordination, resources, education, and continuity to provide ongoing resistance and the development of new militants across these ups and downs.

Given the marginality of unions in the US at this point, a more general experience in the workplace is with a non-unionized environment, especially a precarious one. Three examples from the current IWW illuminate the potential of the intermediate level organization. While somewhat arbitrary I use these examples, because I was involved in all of them so am able to bring forward these reflections with more intimacy, and they provide symmetrical analogies and contradictions.

In the restaurant industry there is a high level of turnover, and generally speaking precarious work. Benefits are non-existent, loyalty to particular shops fairly low, and staff is dependent on tips for basic income while often divided amongst themselves. In a variety of contexts the IWW organized in the restaurant sector. Most shops are in units of less than 20 workers, which are not financially sustainable for any traditional union (run by paid staff) to organize contracts in. It is extremely unlikely that a union would be able to leverage enough power to win a contract, sustain membership and activity needed to maintain the contract, and keep a union in anything but name under these conditions. Consequently a strategy developed in some local branches of the IWW organizing in restaurants and food service. The organizing was oriented to fighting around particular grievances using direct action, and generally through clandestine organizing without the boss knowing a union is involved. A number of successes arose from this approach, in contrast to experiments with rank and file contract-based approaches in small shops. The trajectory of this organizing however was limited. Hot shops produced one or two politicized leaders, but once the grievance passed the shop cooled, and business went back to normal. Often workers would quit anyway, and the leadership did too on a number of occasions. Where the union could recruit and develop the leadership, and convince them to carry the struggle to other shops, the beginning of an industrial network of militants developed. In one city this developed into a permanent organization outside the IWW, though organized with IWW militants, and won a number of successes, integrating more workers into their organization as militants. The IWW in this case began to shift from being a mass organization proper, to being an intermediate organization of class conscious revolutionary militants building a tendency within an industry, and eventually even a separate mass organization while retaining its autonomy. The intermediate organization grew out of mass level struggles and organization, and eventually reproduced mass level organization.

During the early 2000s the IWW in Portland had a series of victories in non-profit social service shops, ultimately winning contracts for a hand full of workers in small shops. While the shops remained organized in name, the social service industrial union branch that was built out of these shops swelled with unorganized social workers. Effectively the industrial union began to function as a network of social service worker militants rather than a representative body of employees (except for the handful of workers under contract). Membership peaked at around 200 for a period. With the strategy oriented primarily towards gaining contracts in small shops in an era of budget cuts, the project was to fail. However, during the peak one of the contract shops was threatened with a massive budget cut by the county, threatening the services provided and the workers deeply. Because this industrial network existed, the industrial union branch was able to organize a section of the social service industry to take action at county budget hearings.

The hearing was picketed, and the county backed down. Social service workers from across the industry uniting for a public display of the contradictions of capital in its mangled approach to trying to serve society. This was press that the county was not in the mood to deal with. The county instantly restored full funding. While this was merely a transitory experience, it demonstrated an alternative to the contractual model of building unions. Ultimately the contract shop was not able to move beyond this activity as a defensive move, and expand their gains and reach, but it served as an example for organizers who participated and took the lessons of that struggle to a different approach. In this case the inability to see beyond the union building project was to be the death of the intermediate network, which otherwise may have been able to expand, clarify itself, and presented a rallying point and challenge to austerity and capitalism.

In the summer of 2004 wildcat strikes swept the ports of the US, bringing the transit of goods to a halt on a massive scale. The strikes were organized by a huge number of small groupings of truckers across the country, tenuously linked, and communicating via text, Nextel phones, community radio, and the internet. The workers were often hostile to the unions trying to organize them, due to bad blood over sweetheart deals for the employer and failed attempts decades earlier. The struggle was actually merely a particular intense flare up of similar fights happening over the 15+ years since the deunionization and deregulation of the ports, and the subsequent shifts in working conditions and class recomposition of the drivers. During that time, drivers had learned how to fight and win directly without intermediaries, and could for periods overcome interethnic competition to present a class-wide front for organization. The problem they faced was constantly that of coordination across the grouplets, sustaining the gains they made, and systematizing their often patched together organizing. The strike wave of 2004 was to fade away on account of these problems. At the time, a mass based militant organization was possible, though the foundation for that transition had not been laid. Both before and after the intermediate level organization could have served to build up to those fights, and sustain the victories through building the needed leadership, connections, and organization.

Exploring Alternatives

To conclude there are a few clear avenues I see open for the building of intermediate organization. I will borrow here from a recent Miami Autonomy and Solidarity organization strategy, and present that collective work as an addition to my individual arguments here. At its most general, our task is two-fold. Revolutionaries active in the mass level need to prioritize work that facilitates the radicalization of militants at the mass level. Miami Autonomy and Solidarity call this M-I (mass to intermediate). At the same time, though of lesser priority given the lower quality of the left, we need to work to engage revolutionaries at the mass level. Given the low level of activity at the mass level by revolutionaries this would be I-M. M-I and I-M gives us a broad perspective for our work with M-I as primary. These strategic priorities are those developed by MAS which I am drawing from and borrowing.

Within existing practice however the intermediate level shows promise with the potential for intermediate organization a close possibility. Within the workers movement, there's a libertarian tendency which could organize collectively to intervene as a force based on

common practices irrespective of the site of struggle. This would require struggle, working out the strategy through practice, debate and even rupture with elements (especially those tied to the institutionalized workers movement) in the milieu, such an intermediate organization would be a potential force for presenting alternatives where the organization doesn't exist, and unions are unwilling. The massive budget cuts, layoffs, and austerity measures are glaring examples where the unions have so far generally chosen to lobby or collaborate, and new forms of struggles have not magically arisen.

The student movement has seen the rise of student-interests based organizing, which has the potential to become mass organization. At this point this work is largely driven by libertarian elements, and an intermediary classist organization could prepare the groundwork for these struggles. In the southern cone of South America similar libertarian or revolutionary student fronts exist presently. With huge cuts and people flooding into colleges to find respite from severe unemployment, a wide crisis is developing in education. There is potential likewise for this work to produce militants who can carry their lessons and organization onto their workplaces following graduation, assuming they don't integrate with capital.

Within housing and transit organizing likewise there is organizing (generally dominated by NGOs unfortunately) that has linked and developed militants with often libertarian methods. The fare strike movements and increasing militancy of transit workers, and the uncertain nature of transit costs, has created potentially explosive situations. The housing crisis and the relative success of direct action against capital has gained momentum and developed self-conscious militants. Intermediate organization could draw out and develop the anti-capitalist logic and tendencies within these struggles, and consolidate gains.

While this summary is too schematic and brief to serve as anything but a raw canvas (an analysis would require another article all together), it illuminates the direction struggle has already taken us, and the possibilities for activity if we are to take them.

Social Anarchism & Organisation: Concentric Circles

By Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro – FARJ

<http://anarkismo.net/article/14067>

The specific anarchist organisation uses, both for its internal and external functioning, the logic of what we call "concentric circles" - strongly inspired by the Bakuninist organisational model. The main reason that we adopt this logic of functioning is because, for us, the anarchist organisation needs to preserve different instances of action. These different instances should strengthen its work while at the same time allowing it to bring together prepared militants with a high level of commitment and approximating people sympathetic to the theory or practice of the organisation - who could be more or less prepared and more or less committed. In short, the concentric circles seek to resolve an important paradox: the anarchist organisation needs to be closed enough to have prepared, committed and politically aligned militants, and open enough to draw in new militants.

A large part of the problems that occur in anarchist organisations are caused by them not functioning according to the logic of concentric circles and by not implementing these two instances of action. Should a person who says they are an anarchist and is interested in the work of the organisation be in the organisation, despite not knowing the political line in depth? Should a laymen interested in anarchist ideas be in the organisation? How do you relate to "libertarians" - in the broadest sense of the term - who do not consider themselves anarchists? Should they be in the organisation? And the older members who have already done important work but now want to be close, but not to engage in the permanent activities of the organisation? And those that can only rarely dedicate time for activism? There are many questions. Other problems occur because there are doubts about the implementation of social work. Must the organisation present itself as an anarchist organisation in the social movements? In its social work can it form alliances with other individuals, groups and organisations that are not anarchist? In such a case, what are the common points to advocate? How do you carry out social work in a field with people from different ideologies and maintain an anarchist identity? How do you ensure that anarchism does not lose its identity when in contact with social movements? On this point there are also many questions.

The concentric circles are intended to provide a clear place for each of the militants and sympathisers of the organization. In addition, they seek to facilitate and strengthen the social work of the anarchist organisation, and finally, establish a channel for the capture of new militants.

In practice, the logic of concentric circles is established as follows. Inside the specific anarchist organisation there are only anarchists that, to a greater or lesser extent, are able to elaborate, reproduce and apply the political line of the organisation internally, in the fronts and in public activity. Also, to a greater or lesser extent, militants should be able to

assist in the elaboration of the strategic-tactical line of the organisation, as well as having full capacity to reproduce and apply it. Militants assume internal functions in the organisation - be they executive, deliberative or extraordinary - as well as external functions with regards to social work. The functions assumed by the militants within the organisation adhere to self-management and federalism, or to horizontal decisions where all the militants have the same power of voice and of vote and where, in specific cases, there is delegation with imperative mandates. The functions to be performed by the delegates must be very well defined so that they "cannot act on behalf of the association unless the members thereof have explicitly authorised them [to do so]; they should execute only what the members have decided and not dictate the way forward to the association" [Luigi Fabbri. "A Organização Anarquista". In: Anarco-Comunismo Italiano p. 124]. Moreover, the functions should be rotated in order to empower everyone and avoid crystallised positions or functions.

The specific anarchist organisation could have only one circle of militants, all of them being in the same instance, or it could have more than one circle - the criteria being collectively defined. For example, this may be the time that a person has been in the organisation or their ability to elaborate the political or tactical-strategic lines. Thus, the newer militants or those with a lesser ability to elaborate the lines may be in a more external (distant) circle, with the more experienced militants with a greater ability for elaborating the lines in another more internal (closer) one. There is not a hierarchy between the circles, but the idea is that the more "inside", or the closer the militant, the better are they able to formulate, understand, reproduce and apply the lines of the organisation. The more "inside" the militant, the greater is their level of commitment and activity. The more a militant offers the organisation, the more is demanded of them by it. It is the militants who decide on their level of commitment and they do or do not participate in the instances of deliberation based on this choice. Thus, the militants decide how much they want to commit and the more they commit, the more they will decide. The less they commit, the less they will decide.

This does not mean that the position of the more committed is of more value than that of the less committed. It means that they participate in different decision-making bodies. For example, those more committed participate with voice and vote in the Congresses, which define the political and strategic lines of the organisation; the less committed do not participate in the Congresses, or only participate as observers, and participate in the monthly assemblies where the tactics and practical applications of the lines are defined.

Thus, inside the specific anarchist organisation you may have one or more circles, which should always be defined by the level of commitment of the militants. In the case of more than one level this must be clear to everyone, and the criteria to change a level available to all militants. It is, therefore, the militant who chooses where they want to be.

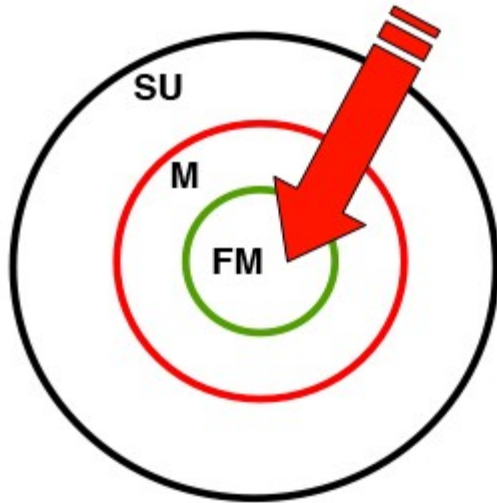
The next circle, more external and distant from the core of the anarchist organisation is no longer part of the organisation, but has a fundamental importance: the level of supporters. This body, or instance, seeks to group together all people who have ideological affinities with the anarchist organisation. Supporters are responsible for

assisting the organisation in its practical work, such as the publishing of pamphlets, periodicals or books; the dissemination of propaganda material; helping in the work of producing theory or of contextual analysis; in the organisation of practical activities for social work: community activities, help in training work, logistical activities, help in organising work, etc. This instance of support is where people who have affinities with the anarchist organisation and its work have contact with other militants, are able to deepen their knowledge of the political line of the organisation, better get to know its activities and deepen their vision of anarchism, etc.

Therefore, the category of support has an important role to help the anarchist organisation put into practice its activities, seeking to bring those interested closer to it. This approximation has as a future objective that some of these supporters will become militants of the organisation. The specific anarchist organisation draws in the greatest possible number of supporters and, through practical work, identifies those interested in joining the organisation and who have an appropriate profile for membership. The proposal for entry into the organisation may be made by the militants of the organisation to the supporter and vice-versa. Although each militant chooses their level of commitment to the organisation and where they want to be, the objective of the anarchist organisation is always to have the greatest number of militants in the more internal circles, with a greater level of commitment.

Let us give a practical example: let's suppose that an organisation has deliberated to work internally with two levels of commitment - or two circles. When the militants are new they enter at the level of "militant" and, when they have been there six months and are prepared and committed militants, move on to the level of "full militant". Let us suppose that this organisation has resolved to have a level of supporters. The objective of the organisation will be to draw in the greatest possible number of supporters, based on the affinity of each one with the organisation, transferring them to the level of militant and, after six months - once prepared - to the level of full militant. We illustrate how this can work in practice.

Flow of Militants



SU being the level of supporters, M of militants and FM of full militants, the objective is the flow indicated by the red arrow - to go from SU to M and from M to FM. Those who are interested can follow this flow, and those who are not can stay where they feel better. For example, if a person wants to give sporadic support, and no more than that, they may want to always stay at SU. The issue here is that all a person's will to work should be utilised by the organisation. This is not because a person has little time, or because they prefer to help at a time when it must be rejected, but because inside a specific anarchist organisation there must be room for all those who wish to contribute. "The criteria for selection that never fails are the accomplishments. The aptitude and efficiency of the militants are, fundamentally, measures for the enthusiasm and the application with which they perform their tasks". [Juan Mechoso. *Acción Directa Anarquista* p.199.]

The logic of concentric circles requires that each militant and the organisation itself have very well defined rights and duties for each level of commitment. This is because it is not just for someone to make decisions about something with which they will not comply. A supporter who frequents activities once a month and makes sporadic contributions, for example, cannot decide on rules or activities that must be met or carried out daily, as they would be deciding something much more for the other militants than for themselves.

It is a very common practice in libertarian groups that people who make sporadic contributions decide on issues which end up being committed to or carried out by the more permanent members. It is very easy for a militant who appears from time to time to want to set the political line of the organisation, for example, since it is not they who will have to follow this line most of the time.

These are disproportionate forms of decision-making in which one ends up deciding something which others enact. In the model of concentric circles we seek a system of rights and duties in which everyone makes decisions about that which they could and should be committed to afterwards. In this way it is normal for supporters to decide only

on that in which they will be involved. In the same way it is normal for militants of the organisation to decide on that which they will carry out. Thus we make decisions and their commitments proportionally and this implies that the organisation has clear criteria for entry, well defining who does and does not take part in it, and at what level of commitment the militants are.

An important criteria for entry is that all of the militants who enter the organisation must agree with its political line. For this the anarchist organisation must have theoretical material that expresses this line - in less depth for those who are not yet members of the organisation and in more depth for those who are. When someone is interested in the work of the anarchist organisation, showing interest in approximation, you should make this person a supporter and give them the necessary guidance. As a supporter, knowing the political line in a little more depth and having an affinity for the practical work of the organisation, the person may show interest in joining the organisation or the organisation can express its interest in the supporter becoming a militant. In both cases the supporter should receive permanent guidance from the anarchist organisation, giving to them theoretical material that will deepen their political line. One or more militants who know this line well will discuss doubts, debate and make clarifications with them. Having secured the agreement of the supporter with the political line of the organisation, and with agreement from both parties, the militant is integrated into the organisation. It is important that in the initial period every new militant has the guidance of another older one, who will orient and prepare them for work. In any event, the anarchist organisation always has to concern itself with the training and guidance of the supporters and militants so that this may allow them to change their level of commitment, if they so desire.

This same logic of concentric circles works in social work. Through it, the anarchist organisation is articulated to perform social work in the most appropriate and effective way. As we have seen, the anarchist organisation is divided internally into fronts for the performance of practical work. For this there are organisations that prefer to establish direct relations with the social movements, and there are others that prefer to present themselves through an intermediary social organisation, which we could call a grouping of tendency.

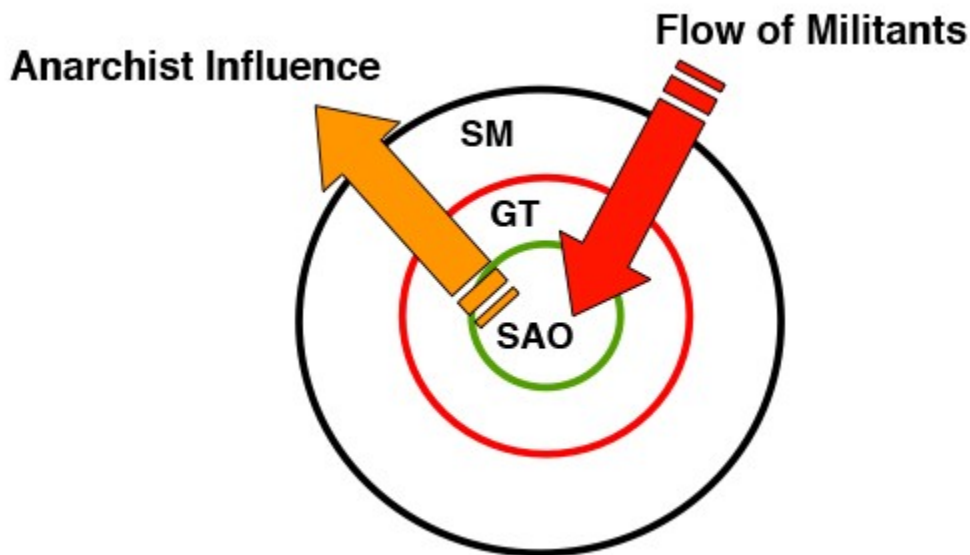
Participation in the grouping of tendency implies acceptance of a set of definitions that can be shared by comrades of diverse ideological origins, but which share certain indispensable exclusions (to the reformists, for example) if seeking a minimum level of real operational coherence. (...) The groupings of tendency, coordinated with each other and rooted in the most combative of the people (...) are a higher level than the latter [the level of the masses]. [*Ibid.* pg 190,192.]

The grouping of tendency puts itself between the social movements and the specific anarchist organisation, bringing together militants of distinct ideologies that have affinity in relation to certain practical questions.

As we have emphasised, there are anarchist organisations that prefer to present themselves directly in the social movements, without the necessity of the groupings of tendency, and others preferring to present themselves by means of these. In both cases

there are positive and negative points and each organisation must determine the best way to act. As the views that we advocate in the social movements are much more practical than theoretical, it may be interesting to work with a grouping of tendency, incorporating people who agree with some or all of the positions that we advocate in the social movements (strength, classism, autonomy, combativeness, direct action, direct democracy and revolutionary perspective) and that will help us to augment the social force in defence of these positions.

In the same way as in the diagram above, the idea is that the specific anarchist organisation seeks insertion in this intermediate level (grouping of tendency) and through it presents itself, conducting its work in social movements in search of social insertion. Again we illustrate how this works in practice.



SAO being the specific anarchist organisation, GT the grouping of tendency and SM the social movement, there are two flows.

The first - that of the influence of the SAO - seeks to go to the GT and from there to the SM. Let us look at a few practical examples. The anarchist organisation that desires to act in a union may form a grouping of tendency with other activists from the union movement who defend some specific banners (revolutionary perspective, direct action, etc.) and by means of this tendency may influence the union movement, or the union in which it acts. Or the anarchist organisation may choose to work with the landless movement and, for this, brings people who defend similar positions (autonomy, direct democracy, etc.) in the social movement together in a grouping of tendency. By means of this grouping of tendency the specific anarchist organisation acts within the landless movement and, in this way, seeks to influence it.

This form of organisation aims to solve a very common problem that we find in activism. For example, when we know very dedicated activists; revolutionaries that advocate self-

management, autonomy, grassroots democracy, direct democracy, etc. and with whom we do not act because they are not anarchists. These activists could work with the anarchists in the groupings of tendency and defend their positions in the social movements together.

The second arrow in the diagram shows the objective of the flow of militants. That is, in this scheme of work, the goal is to bring people in the social movements that have practical affinity with the anarchists into the groupings of tendency and, from there, bring those that have ideological affinity closer to the anarchist organisation. In the same way as in the previous diagram, if a militant has great practical affinity with the anarchists, but is not an anarchist, they must be a member of the grouping of tendency and will be fundamental to the achievement of social work. If they have ideological affinities, they may be closer to or even join the organisation.

The objective of the anarchist organisation is not to turn all activists into anarchists, but to learn to work with each of these activists in the most appropriate way. While having mutual interests the militants may change their positions in the circles (from the social movement to the grouping of tendency or from the grouping of tendency to the anarchist organisation). Without these mutual interests, however, each one acts where they think it more pertinent.

This article is an excerpt from Anarquismo Social e Organização --

<http://www.anarkismo.net/article/10861>

Translation by Jonathan-ZACF

The problems posed by the concrete class struggle and popular organisation

Reflections from an Anarchist Communist Perspective

<http://www.anarkismo.net/article/1743>

As anarchists start discussing the prospects for anarchist activity in the medium term, the link becomes clearer between strategy and tactics: that is to say, what we see as our goal, the libertarian society, and the means through which we are going to reach it. Considering the strong rejection of traditional anarchism of the artificial distinction between "means" and "ends", it is very surprising how often they are divorced in anarchist practice. This is caused mainly due to the lack of strategic planning, what should create the bridge to link the "distant future", and the day to day issues we deal with. There is little chance of disagreement in any of the two, both the daily issues and the distant future (though nothing can be discarded in the mad zoo of Anarchy), but clearly, it is in the medium term prospects when most of the disagreement emerges, as it is in that point when we start talking about the revolutionary path to achieve the overthrowing of the old society and the birth of the new one. It is only when we have decided our medium term prospects when the struggles turn to be "revolutionary", as they start serving a goal, as we can take the political initiative and as it is only then when the distant future stops being a utopian dream to become a revolutionary programme.

We acknowledge the need of achieving something more than media coverage or a bunch of new militants with each struggle. We acknowledge as well, the need to create some mechanism so that we can test if we are actually going somewhere. That is supposed to be the creation of permanent (organic) links that, in one way or another, will survive the passing sparks of rebellion, linking those rebellions in time. And at the same time, we need to have a set of objectives to aim for that will serve as the guide to our activity and the evaluation tool with which to measure effectiveness.

With regard to the organic links between struggles, we need to look into the nature of the actors in struggle, to know how to address, from a libertarian point of view, the problem of organisations in society.

ACTORS OF STRUGGLE

First of all, and there is not much need to argue this in length with class struggle anarchists, the basis of the struggle is the contradiction between two fundamental classes; working class and bourgeoisie. As comrade Mac Giollamóir stated in Workers Solidarity (86), *"The working class is one side of the social relationship that defines capitalism. This relationship is the relationship of the employer and the employed. It is the relationship between the capitalist who buys the worker's ability to labour and live freely and the worker who gives up that ability in order to live at all"* It is part of a dynamic, dialectical, relationship; not a set of fixed characters. The main characteristics of the working class are its dependence on the wage system; its lower rank in the hierarchical organisation of labour (you always end up having someone above); its nature as a creator

of profit that is appropriated by the capitalist; and thus, the fact that it lives exploited and oppressed.

This is the underlying reality that shapes the life of modern -capitalist- society. It is real, but we are talking about a relationship, about a description of a process, about theoretical models to understand a reality that is far more complex than these two antagonistic poles (otherwise, revolution wouldn't pose no problem, as if only by numbers the ruling class would have been long been expelled from power). Between this two poles, a wide range of grey areas do exist. And the class conflict assumes a concrete expression in concrete characters. Who are those characters? That is a matter of paramount importance to any revolutionary, and the definition of those actors of struggle will determine to a great extent the tactics chosen.

We can tell these actors of struggles in groups or categories by many indicators:

1. Problems that affect them immediately and their immediate interests;
2. Traditions of struggle and organisation sprouting out from these set of problems and interests;
3. A common place or activity in society;

No matter that the actors can be in quiet, the potential for them to become a factor of explosion of the class struggle can be there in slumber.

As well, it is worth mentioning that the actors of struggle (or popular subjects, as they are also called), do not necessarily represent a clear cut class; take for example the traditional examples of actors of struggle - students, workers, neighbours and peasants. Only workers can be considered a "pure" class, while all the others contain members of different classes and all sorts of grey areas (petit bourgeoisie, bourgeoisie, the nebulous middle class, marginal elements and the working class). The class nature of the social actors, in general, gives an important need to a working class tendency expressed as a political force, able to win other segments of society to a revolutionary cause and programme.

These, as well, are categories that don't exist in isolation from one another: the kids of the worker can be students, and they are all residents of a certain community. But their identity as part of a certain actor of struggle becomes clear when the struggle emerges, and around certain organisational traditions. To give an example, in the year 1983 in Chile there erupted huge mass rallies against the dictatorship of Pinochet; although the calls to struggle came from the Miners' unions, the relative weakness of the unions in a semi-clandestine context, caused that the main space for protest were the slums - where the workers lived - and other layers of society as well, including small shop owners, and so on, took part on the struggle right beside workers. But the identity of these struggles was created around certain organisations and struggles that were located in that concrete space -the slums in this case. And many of them were the same people that ten years before, articulated their identity around the industrial networks, during the Unidad

Popular period (1970-1973). This reflects the dynamic nature of the social actors, and of their identity. But the creation of such an identity, and the creation of those actual demands, are the ground over which struggle can flourish; not over a theoretical statement about the social conflict in abstract, or over lofty demands of social change.

Once we decide which ones are the popular subjects in a concrete place and time, we can start thinking in the medium term about concrete demands for struggle, in the frame of a programme, and we can take the political initiative. But we can also start thinking of ways to organise those sectors in accordance to our political views, or at least, how to influence in a healthy and libertarian way, their own organisations. But here we need to be very careful not to confuse the different spaces and types of organisations, if we want to create unity and not discord. The best example of how not to do it is the classic Trotskyist approach that completely mixes up the domains of a party, with the ones of a social movement. This political short sightedness leads to the shrinking and splitting of every single group in which they take part, until it is impossible to distinguish them from their "fronts". Sectarianism is the only logical result of this practice, and weakening of the social forces. Historically, anarchists have suffered from the same problem in the form of anarcho-syndicalism, that traditionally confused a "party" with a "union". The results are there for everyone to see: they didn't end up acting like a proper political force, and they didn't act like a proper union. That caused its quick decline almost everywhere.

So we need to know what we are talking about when we talk about organising the people for the struggle, as there are many sorts of organisation, and we need to have a clear policy in all of the different levels of the organisation of the people.

THREE LEVELS OF ORGANISATION

Taking into account the above mentioned (that is, the nature of the working class and its concrete expressions), we can now get into the matter of this document: the three levels on which the people organise and the way to build a movement of a revolutionary and libertarian nature. It should be stated that there are no magical formulas for this, and that the description of these three levels is as theoretical and general as the definition of the working class; they do exist in an essential way, but they are expressed in concrete and specific ways as well.

The levels of the organisation are determined by the merging of both a programme of action and the social nature of the actors alongside whom we fight. To go any further, let us first agree on an unavoidable dilemma of every revolutionary movement: the acknowledgement that only the unity of the working class can overthrow the ruling class and the fact that the working class is not a homogeneous block - there are different levels of awareness and class consciousness, there are different ideas, opinions, tendencies, some being more inclined to a libertarian pole, and others more towards an authoritarian pole. Therefore, unity is necessary, but an absolute unity is just not possible. So we need to determine the levels of unity that we can achieve in different levels of organisation [1]. It is not possible to divide this issue from the nature of each level of organisation:

1. The level of the social, popular or mass organisations -the social level: This level is characterised by those organisations who bring together a single actor of struggle, regardless of their political leanings (trade unions, student unions, community associations, etc.). The unity has to be as broad as possible, we have to struggle against sectarianism in them, and the way to influence them is by agitating demands, practices and exposing the contradictions of the system in them. Here is where the unity of the bulk of the people is possible, and this should be regarded as the aim. And though they are not political by its nature, they can get political in the course of struggle and by the natural development of the class contradictions. No matter how political they can become, they cannot be confused with a political group or with a tendency. And we need to keep it clear that we aim that our ideas influence the majority, but minorities cannot be purged and we cannot impose ideological definitions or labels on them.

2. The level of the tendency, network, current or front -the social political level: This is an intermediate level, in this one are brought together members of a single popular subject with a certain political leaning: this is what makes it different from the above level. This leaning, though, cannot be as defined as the one of a political group or party. Certain activists or militants that share outlook and that share policies regarding to the specific issue of their concern, come together to form a certain tendency inside of a bigger movement or organisation. A good example can be a tendency in a Trade union: people can disagree on many political issues, they might come from different political traditions, but they will, for instance, agree in developing a combative trade unionism and in the fight against social partnership, for instance. You really don't need to agree with anything else; it would be mistaken to try to confuse unity with "marriage" and you would only risk failing to achieve the most urgent tasks. They would be more specific, politically talking, than the trade union itself; but they wouldn't be a defined, homogenous, political force. Another good example are the experience of the "libertarian fronts" in South America -they bring together students, workers and neighbours who share a libertarian approach to politics, in terms of organisation and means of struggle, and that share a set of concrete proposal regarding to their problems. But the people in the fronts would disagree on many of those issues that are not necessary for unity's sake in the specific struggle and organisation to which they belong.

3. The level of the revolutionary organisation or party -the political revolutionary level: This level is the most specific of them all, and it is characterised by gathering people from different popular subjects (ie. Students, workers, etc.), but who share a political view and a political programme (of a revolutionary and libertarian nature, in our case). Coming from different backgrounds, it is obvious that this level will naturally refer to changes in society as a whole, and this level as well is the most restricted; unity here is based on the required levels of ideological and tactical unity. Otherwise, there is not much point in staying together, if it is not possible to come out with a collectively agreed programme for intervention in society at large. This level is the one that reflects clearest the class struggle positions and the different class options assumed by the different political forces.

This is, briefly, a general overview of the problem of the actors of struggle, class and

organisation. It is only a skeleton to be used for the discussion about what to do in the medium term, and how to address the big problems we have ahead in trying to define a revolutionary path for our respective region in the XXI century.

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.
July 15th, 2005.

[1] It is a merit of Bakunin and of the Platform, to give us very interesting glimpses over these issues.

Winning the class war - An anarcho-syndicalist strategy

<http://libcom.org/library/winning-class-war-anarcho-syndicalist-strategy>

The Direct Action Movement's 1991 pamphlet on strategy, setting out a vision of networks of militant workers seeking to create explicitly revolutionary workplace and community based groups capable of initiating collective direct action - revolutionary unions. The DAM became Solidarity Federation in 1994.

"One must try to increase as much as possible the theoretical content of all our activities, but without the 'dry and shriveled doctrinalism' which could destroy in part the great constructive action which our comrades are carrying forward in the relentless fight between the haves and the have nots. Our people stand for action on the march. It is while going forward that we overtake. Don't hold them back, even to teach them 'the most beautiful theories' ..."

Francisco Ascaso, from *Durruti — the People Armed*

Throwing down the gauntlet

Major social changes have taken place these last few years in Britain and throughout the world, and changes continue to take place at an increasing rate. 'Thatcherism' has, over the past decade, made a decisive move away from the mixed economy and welfare state of the so-called post-war political consensus, stridently bearing the standard of free-market capitalism and anti-trades unionism. It is becoming increasingly apparent to everyone that our fate is very much tied in with international economics and politics. The events in eastern Europe will have major repercussions on the whole world, and the balance of power within it, as will the creation of the Single European Market in 1992.

The working class needs to take stock of the new situation in which it finds itself, and needs to organise itself as a class if it is to fight for its interests against the bosses.

The once all-powerful British trades unions have, faced with a hostile Tory Government and with employers not prepared to accept the gains made by workers over past decades, failed, and failed miserably. How many times since the steelworkers' strike of 1980 have we seen sections of workers left to fight on their own with the TUC leaders merely mouthing words of support?

The trades unions are not going to fight for workers' interests in the 1990s and beyond. In the past the unions paid lip-service to the emancipation of the working class and to Socialism (meaning Labourism). They don't even pay lip-service now.

Originally, unions were an inevitable reaction by workers to the realities of life in a class society. The workers needed to defend themselves against the opposing interests of the bosses and organised themselves into combinations and trade unions in order to do this, realising that workers' strength lay in the organisation of their large numbers.

The unions in this country accepted the legitimacy of the existence of social classes. They did not want to put an end to an exploitative social system but to get the best for workers within it, which, in practice, means collaborating with the bosses and the capitalist system. The class collaboration of the unions has led them to become more and more a part of the system. It now means that they not only fail to defend workers' interests but often go firmly against them. Their priority is getting 'recognition' at any price (recognition from the bosses, of course, not the workers). Getting back to the good old days of beer and sandwiches at Number 10 is what they are interested in, not fighting the class struggle.

All the time we hear workers and left-wingers accusing the trade union leaders of selling out and being bureaucratic. This is, of course, true, but we view this as inevitable in organisations that aim to collaborate with capitalism rather than to destroy it.

The reality is that if the working class doesn't take things to the heart of the matter and destroy the class system and take control of society, we are doomed to a perpetual struggle to live: we fight — they give a bit — they take it back — we fight ...

Workers' gains might last for some time (for example, the conditions won by printworkers, which have now largely gone out of the window) or only a short while (until management reinterpret the agreement they made the week before) but, sooner or later, the struggle starts all over again.

What is needed is a long-term perspective that goes beyond wages and conditions, that looks to winning a decisive victory in the class war.

Only workers through organisations they themselves run can gain that victory. For years, political solutions have been put, by trade unionism, in the hands of the Labour Party, supposedly fighting for us in the bastions of power and privilege. What have workers got to show for it all? Neil Kinnock? The answer is not to put our faith in more radical or 'revolutionary' political parties. The answer is having faith in ourselves, in our class to fight our own battles. The slogan of the First Workers' International has stood the test of time: "the emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves". The workers themselves, not the 'professional revolutionaries' and the intellectuals who follow in the footsteps of the dictators Lenin and Trotsky.

We must recognise no power over the working class, and likewise we can allow no institutionalised power within our own organisations. The apathy and powerlessness the present unions create in their members cannot be allowed to continue. The decision-making process must be under the control of the workers. Real workers' organisations have no need for full-time officials. They become superfluous when we take our destinies into our own hands.

Working class organisations should seek to unite our class (and that includes those not in work) rather than fighting for petty sectional interests. Look at the trade unions: fighting each other to 'unionise' workplaces that haven't even been built, like they are bidding for

a contract — lowest offer wins. Instead of this, SOLIDARITY must again become the morality of the workers' movement. An injury to one is an injury to all.

But the most important thing of all is that workers' unions should not only fight for immediate improvements in our lives but should have the aim of creating a free and classless society, based on workers' control and the satisfaction of human needs.

Since the trade unions are not in any way designed to carry out these aims and, indeed, are themselves an important part of capitalism, our objective cannot be to reform them (still less to elect 'better' leaders), but has to be to create a new and altogether independent workers' movement.

After years of dominance by social-democratic trade unions and Labour Party what we are advocating — revolutionary unionism — is certainly a bold step. However, what we want is not entirely new and untried. With the failure of trade unionism and the collapse of Marxism-Leninism the old traditions of revolutionary unionism and anarcho-syndicalism inspire and teach us as we build a new workers' movement.

Finally, this pamphlet is not a blue-print for the creation of such a movement. The precise directions of a living movement cannot and should not be laid down in advance in pillars of stone. It represents, rather, a first step in the process of bringing about a revolutionary workers' movement.

The phoney war

Surely if nothing else the Thatcherite eighties have exposed the bankruptcy of reformist trade unions. In the very first year of the decade the planned attacks on the organised sections of the working class began with the brutal closure of steel mills resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs and the destruction of whole communities. It was to set a dreadful pattern repeated throughout the decade as groups of workers from miners, print workers through to ambulance workers were left, with honourable exceptions, isolated to slug it out with rampant management backed by the full force of the state. A by-product of these long hard disputes is the now common sight of groups of workers being forced on to the streets in order to collect money just to survive. Indeed, as the decade came to an end with the ambulance dispute, union leaders, having now dropped totally the idea of class struggle and the need to spread disputes to other groups of workers, came to see street collecting not as a weakness but part of the strategy for winning. The idea being that it is not collective strength that wins disputes but convincing the 'general public' via the media that you have a 'just' case, and of course large amounts of money collected can be offered up as a sign of so-called public support. The archetype of this new union thinking being the leader and main spokesman during the ambulance dispute, Mr Media himself Roger Poole, who even went so far as to employ a media consultant as an advisor. If as workers we are not going to be left to the mercy of these PR men masquerading as trade unionists it is essential that we start looking at why the struggles of the '80s were lost and at the very nature of reformist trade unions. We must look at what the unions' aims are, how do they function and what role do the cliched rank and file have within them? We also have to look at the 'lefts' traditional response to the unions

and the role they play within them. In short we have to start by asking what lies behind the myth of British trade unions?

Let us start by looking at the basic building block of any union — the branch. The first thing to note is that the vast majority of branches exist and function away from the point of struggle, that is the workplace. The only contact with the workplace the branch has, and therefore the union, is through the workplace activists who attend and the workers who bring problems encountered in their daily working lives to the branch to solve. This they only do on rare occasions and it is safe to say that most workers only attend branch meetings on a handful of occasions throughout their working lives, if at all. Indeed, surveys show that at any given point only 5% of union members attend branch meetings. Nor is it necessarily the case that even those who attend on a regular basis have much in common. Many unions organise meetings on the basis of where members live, these meetings can consist of groups of people who may not work in the same workplace or even the same industry, the only thing in common being that they happen to belong to the same union. This type of meeting can even be reduced to members just turning up to pay dues. Even those in unions that do organise on an industrial basis union meetings are still dominated not by workplace matters but internal union business. The staple diet of such meetings being the endless correspondence, various motions and the countless elections and nominations to the various committees, conferences and union positions. Which may be all well and good if the views expressed at branches were treated for what they are — the views of the tiny number of activists. But they are not. What happens at union meetings is that you have tens of people acting for hundreds and occasionally hundreds acting for thousands. The culmination of this charade being the block vote where union leaders get up at various conferences casting votes on behalf of hundreds of thousands of members on policies and for people that the overwhelming majority of members will never have heard of let alone voted for.

We should also dispel the idea that all branch activists are also involved in the workplace struggle against the bosses. For a start, in many unions branch secretaries are full-timers so never see the workplace. And even when they are not officially full-time they can become so through the back door method, by sitting on so many committees and holding so many positions they do not have the time for something as mundane as work. Then there are those who are active in the union but have no base in the workplace. These people can even be on the so-called 'left' of the union who will argue for all sorts of motions to be passed from 'troops out' to bringing down apartheid, all of which will be achieved by strongly worded letters from the union, but do little to organise in the workplace and would not dream of organising strike action in defence of basic rights. Indeed it could be argued that unions act as a check on militancy even at branch level. How often do angry workers turn to the branch for support and advice over incidents that have happened at work only to have all that anger deflected away from taking effective action by branch officials promising to 'get something done' by contacting head office or bringing in the full-timer. If then, branch meetings are hardly hives of activity where the mass of workers meet, argue and exchange ideas, it can be said that they so at least retain some links with mass of the membership.

Which is more than can be said about most union bodies above branch level. We now enter that strange world of the full-time union official whose working lives consist of endless meetings with other union officials, management and union activists. The only time these people come across ordinary union members is when they are called in, often by management to 'resolve' a problem. The higher up the union structure the more remote they became, ending with union leaders who only come across ordinary working class people on a day to day basis when they have a friendly chat with their chauffeur or the office cleaner.

It is safe to say then that the unions exist in the main outside the workplace with the bulk of union activity taking place above the members heads. The ordinary members commitment being limited by paying subs and perhaps seeing the need to 'support the union'. Looking to the union in return for help if trouble does arise as individuals or collectively.

Given that the unions organise away from the point of struggle, let us turn to their aims and how they set about achieving those aims. The main aim of any union is to maintain its power within as part of the wider trade union movement and also to exert pressure and maintain influence on the state, management and society as a whole. They seek to do this in various ways, one of the most important being maintaining as high a membership as possible. This is of prime importance not least in the TUC pecking order. This has now reached the point where it seems to matter little how remote it inactive that membership is or maybe just as long as the dues are coming in and membership figures are up. Getting to the bizarre stage where unions sign up members, in single union deals for factories that are not yet even built. As for their role within the state and government, this has all but been eliminated under Thatcher. But the desperation of the unions can be seen for instance in the willingness of the 'mighty' TUC, in return for being allowed some involvement with what was the Manpower Services Commission, helping to administer youth schemes like the YTS that not only pay slave wages but encouraged dangerous working conditions for thousands of working class young people. But of all the areas that the unions seek to have influence in by far the most important is its dealing with management, for it is from this area that all their power flows. They must retain the right to negotiate wages and conditions with management. It is by having the power to negotiate on behalf of workers that they retain their influence within the workplace and ultimately attract and retain members.

In turn it is having that control and influence in the workplace that they are of use to the boss class. The unions offer stability in the workplace, they channel workers anger, shape and influence their demands and, if need be, act to police the workforce. Perhaps this is best summed up by a quote from the boss class themselves: a manager when asked by a reporter why his multi-national had recognised unions in South Africa replied "have you ever tried negotiating with a football field full of militant angry workers?" And it was this threat of an uncontrollable militant, if not revolutionary workforce, that first persuaded the capitalist of the need to accept reformist unions, seeing them as a way to control the workforce.

Not that this position between workforce and management has been easy to maintain for the unions. On the one hand they have struggled to control workplace oriented strikes at times of workers militancy, often refusing to make strikes 'official'. They have even lowered themselves to issuing threats of the removal of union cards in the days of the close shop, thus endangering workers' jobs, if the workers refused to go back to work. On the other hand, in times of recession and reduced workers militancy, union bosses are face with a management freed from the need to control the workforce, to a degree anyway, so the union has a reduced or no role at all, leaving them with no option but to call strikes to defend their position. No better example of this can be found than in the 1989 railworkers strike. British Rail having virtually ignored the union for years decided to go the whole hog and withdraw national pay bargaining. The panic-stricken NUR leaders had no choice than to call a national strike, for only the first time since 1926, apart from the one-day fiasco in 1962.

Because of the union weakness in the workplace, they had to lump a number of issues together, call for the most acceptable action possible, and organise tours of workplaces to try to get the message across. Needless to say, even with a highly successful strike the action was soon called off and all other issues dropped once management conceded national pay bargaining.

But then strikes have always been the last resort for unions and then only for short-term gains. In the long term they seek the election of Labour governments, under which the leadership could sit down with capitalists and the state to administer society for the supposed benefit of all. The control over the workforce would be their guarantee of power. However, the Thatcher years have meant that the unions have had to redefine how they maintain their position. Whereas in the past their power has been based on their ability to both control and at times promote workers militancy, now much more emphasis is being placed on the old enemy, the law, to guarantee their position. Under a Labour government's so-called 'positive workers right' not only will the unions right to recruit workers be made law, but a new system, guaranteeing negotiating rights, based on the European-style Workers Councils, will be introduced. There is no doubt as we enter the '90s that the trade unions are looking for the Northern European style of unions, with their emphasis on individual rights, as opposed to the collective rights with binding arbitration, and co-operation as opposed to strike action as the way forward. To quote that rising star of the TUC and assistant to Willis, John Monks: "We still represent 40% of the workforce. Social partnership is the norm in Europe. It is Britain that is out of step." And even without a Labour government, with 1992 and the European Social Charter, Mr Monks may still have his way.

As the movement in the unions away from strikes gathers pace, we must consider how little trade unions have used the strike weapon in any case. To do this it is important to distinguish between two types of strike: the first are those organised by the union which may or may not have the backing of the workforce; and secondly those organised in the workplace by the workers themselves and which are not supported by or made official by the union. It is the latter which forms the bulk of strikes and which have in fact been the mainstay and backbone of workers militancy in Britain. The Donovan Report, which

came out of the Royal Commission into the unions and was set up by a Labour government, found that no less than 95% of post-war strikes were unofficial. The people often at the centre of these strikes were shop stewards who, being based in the workplace and having the support of the people they worked with daily, were in a position to organise quick and effective strikes which resolved problems and made gains.

But by acting as the focal point of workers struggles, not only did shop stewards come into conflict with management, they also came into conflict with the unions who did everything they could, in the main unsuccessfully, to contain them. To quote Bill Jordan of the AEU, commenting on why the unions 'social contract' with the Labour government went wrong, states: "We reverted to type, as if fighting a 19th century class war. We failed to respond because of the rise and rise of the power of the shop stewards. The power of the full-time officials was passed into the factory ... when national officials were asked to deliver their side of the social contract they couldn't." In other words the unions could not keep their side of the bargain with the state because workers were ignoring the unions' call for class collaboration and had taken matters into their own hands.

The question must be asked, why after decades of militancy, workers were unable to organise a general fight back against Tory government attacks? And with hindsight it is not hard to see some of the fundamental faults which existed. One of the most basic being that workers still restricted themselves, through the unions, to economic struggles. No wider political perspective was put forward linking the day-to-day struggles with the need for an alternative to capitalism. This was not so much a problem in the post-war boom, but come the recession in the late '70s where management were opening their empty order books to workers and blaming the international slump for redundancies, then there was a crying need for an organisation committed to putting forward an alternative to capitalism. A role the reformist trade unions were unwilling and unable to take on.

Again we had workers in conflict with and feeling betrayed by the unions whilst no alternative was put forward. Few national workplace organisations were built where workers could come together to discuss problems and plan actions. This left them dependent on the unions for an overall view of their industries. Whilst direct links with workers in other industries were not made, meaning that relations with other groups of workers was conducted through inter-union bodies and the TUC. These factors tended to leave groups of workers isolated with their efforts concentrated on the immediate day-to-day issues. As the Donovan Report found, the vast majority of strikes were over local issues only lasting for a few days.

The above problems were to prove fatal when Thatcher came to power. For what the '80s have shown was not that workers were not prepared to fight, after all group after group of workers have attempted to take on the state, but that workers have no organisation that could co-ordinate and plan a class-wide offensive. Having few direct links with workplaces outside of their own industries, strikers were forced to appeal for support through other unions and the TUC. These bodies, in the majority of cases, did not even try to mobilise support. On the few occasions when unions did back workers from other

unions, links with their own members had become so weak that they were unable to get them to take action. No better example of this is the miners' strike of 1984-85, when the TGWU ordered its members to boycott coal, only to be ignored by the vast majority of members.

On the other hand, when workers did take solidarity action, it was often the case that because of the nature of their jobs that they had strong links with the people they were supporting. For example, some of the most effective solidarity action during the '80s was taken by railway workers during both the steel and miners strikes, it cannot be mere coincidence that the railworkers gave such tremendous support to two groups of workers with whom they had strong historical links, by working together on a daily basis.

That is not to say that the 'left' has not tried to get over the problems posed by the dominance of the reformist trade unions. Since the war they have attempted to organise 'rank and file' groups in the unions. These have taken various forms, for example Flashlight and Building Workers Charter have set up around the National Rank and File Movement of the '70s, and of course there is the broad left. But the very nature of these groups, and of the politics of those who have tried to organise them, has meant that these groups were also doomed to failure.

Since the war this has taken the form of trying to build rank and file groups within the unions. This task has been undertaken by various political groups from those set up by the CP in the 1950's and 60's, eg Flashlight and Building Workers Charter through to the SWP-dominated rank and files of the 70's and of course the militant-dominated Broad Lefts. Needless to say, such Marxist groups were not slow to manipulate rank and files for their own ends, even if this was to the detriment of those rank and files and the workers involved.

For instance, Building Workers Charter, which had widespread support in the building industry failed to appear in the massive and bitter building workers' strike in the early 70's due to the manoeuvring of the CP. Thus they not only failed to provide an alternative lead to the reformist unions in a crucial strike but so demoralised supporters of Building Workers Charter that it led to its eventual collapse.

Again in 1973 when the IS (now the SWP) tried to set up a national rank and file movement, the CP-dominated rank and files boycotted the conference organised to launch the movement with the Morning Star denouncing the whole event as an IS plot.

The conference itself was so bogged down with the manoeuvring of various sects that the movement never got off the ground. The manoeuvring of the Marxists should come as no surprise because they all saw rank and files not only as recruiting grounds but also as a way of increasing their influence in the unions. This followed from their political theory, that the unions were the place where workers organise at an economic level, whilst the 'more advanced' would wish to organise on a political level and join their organisation. With this outlook the Marxists deliberately set out to limit the rank and files to the basic day-to-day economic struggle. Though there were variations between rank

and file groups, with some making vague references to the nationalisation of industry, they were, in the main, devoid of revolutionary politics. You will search in vain for any attempt to link the day-to-day struggles with the need to transform society. The links between the Labour Party and the unions were never challenged, in fact attacks on the Labour Party were restricted to the 'right wing'. Their aims were limited to reforming the unions and defending pay and conditions through the use of industrial action.

It would be a mistake, however, to put down the lack of politics simply to the Marxist influence. Instead we should look at the nature of rank and file groups themselves. They were not made up of masses of ordinary workers but trade union activists who were members of political groups with axes to grind, sinking their political differences to the lowest common denominator, that is militant trade unionism. Perhaps a quote from the paper of one of the more successful rank and files of the 70's, the NALGO Action Group, will illustrate this. An editorial stated: 'the future development of NALGO Action Group remains as it always has, in the hands of its supporters whose political persuasions are less important than their common desire to work for greater democracy and militancy within NALGO and larger trade union movement'.

Indeed as rank and files were made up of activists, often of different political persuasions, it was vital that differences did not surface. Where faction fighting did occur there were all sorts of problems. For instance a number of attempts to start a rank and file in the rail industry in the 70's failed due to political in-fighting. Again, in Building Worker (at the time of writing, still a functioning rank and file) progress has been hindered by differences. To use just one issue of their paper as an example, the 3 main articles consisted of one arguing for the need for a revolutionary party; one for the need to support reform of the Labour Party; and the other for the need for building workers to join the T&G.

The attitude of the post-war rank and files towards the trade unions, all without exception never sought to challenge the reformist nature of the unions. Instead of developing a revolutionary alternative in the workplace they concentrated on trying to reform union structures, often seeking to do little more than making unions more democratic and accountable to 'ordinary members', which in reality, as we have seen above meant little more than the tiny minority that attended branch meetings. This meant that much time and energy was spent working within the union structures outside the workplace. This ranged from caucuses before union meetings; building support for motions to national conferences; and standing for positions at branch level right up to national level. Some even put forward people for TUC elections.

It is true to say that rank and files did some excellent work around various disputes, but by acting as a group standing somewhere between the union and the workplace they also played a negative role. By constantly arguing for changes to the union structure; the need to make branches more democratic; the need for the leadership to be more accountable etc, they not only offered false hope but channeled energy and discontent away from the real problem — the social democratic nature of reformist trade unions.

Class mobilisation

At the turn of the twentieth century, Britain had a large revolutionary (syndicalist) union current. It was still widely believed that the trade unions were, to some extent, malleable; that they were still reformable to a revolutionary position. But following the Russian Revolution, this current was largely seduced by Bolshevism and so became irrelevant to the growth of any real mass working class organisation. Many activists were busy trying to build the Communist Party, rather than a revolutionary class organisation.

Internationally this was not necessarily the case. Anarcho-syndicalist unions were fighting to destroy capitalism and the state either as the majority workers organisations in that particular country, i.e. Argentinean FORA and Spanish CNT; or as minorities, i.e. the Italian USI and the SAC in Sweden.

But eventually revolutionary unionism lost out everywhere to repression from democratic, fascist or Stalinist states, and to the charms of consumer and welfare capitalism.

The economic crisis which has developed since the 1960s, and the failure of reformist unions to fight anti-working class legislation, has led to a regeneration to revolutionary unionism in many parts of the world.

Groups have developed to promote the ideas in Britain, Japan, most of Europe, and in places such as Spain there has been the re-formation and growth of the older established anarcho-syndicalist unions.

Elsewhere we have seen the development of 'independent' unions, for instance in Poland, South Africa and the Philippines. But these lack, have lacked, a clear revolutionary perspective which consequently leads to problems.

In Poland workers are now governed harshly by 'Solidarity'; in South Africa unions are being taken over by middle class politicians of the ANC. Independent unions are not in themselves revolutionary. Clear revolutionary political goals are also vital for any real change to develop.

So, what does constitute revolutionary unionism? How is such a union organised? What does it do? What does it believe in?

First and foremost, a revolutionary union has to be more than purely economic in its outlook. It has to be political. Not in a party political sense, but in the knowledge that it is aiming for a completely different kind of society. No doubt members of liberal-social democratic unions will claim that they want something completely different. Well, perhaps they do want something different to Thatcherite freedom and collectivist self-management. They simply want an arena in which they can be involved with the bosses in the running of welfare, pseudo democracy, where they will get the chance to govern come election day with their soul-mates in the Labour Party.

A political outlook cannot develop merely out of the election of politicians. It develops out of an involvement in political decision making. This is a learning experience. Politics and economics are not to be artificially divided. Social democratic unions are bankrupt of any credibility because of their insistence on this divide. When we take economic action through strikes and boycotts, for instance, we should also be learning self-management and solidarity. There is also the opportunity of becoming internationally aware — for instance, the miners strike saw for the first time workers meeting fellow workers and learning from each other, instead of from the pages of some tatty newspaper, or through stereotypes of Spaniards and Germans.

What we want is a libertarian communist society, built by organising in the workplace and the community. What we want is nothing less than the complete overthrow of capitalism, in whatever malign or benign guise it may adopt.

Our union must be based on mutual aid and solidarity. Such fundamental principles are not negotiable. They involve fighting the class war. A phrase so out of fashion with chic, middle class lefties. We know that the class war is ceaseless. We defend our immediate and future needs, whether as part of the union or not. For instance, health and safety at work is vital for all workers as is the wage struggle. Where we differ from the liberals is that we fight for our gains and take them. We totally reject collaboration with the exploiting class. What they deign to give us, they may take back. What we take is ours, and we will not allow them to steal from us again.

So, whilst fighting the class war for immediate gains, we never lose sight that without an end to capitalism, gains are only transitory. We only have to look at how improvements in the conditions of mineworkers and printers were savagely destroyed in the '80s to be aware of this. Even the 'right to strike' is being taken away by Tory legislation, and the Labour Party intends to maintain much of such legislation. What we call for is not the 'right to strike', it is our duty to take industrial action. The end of welfare is evidence that we cannot, and should not, depend on the state for our -well being. Welfare has been used as a weapon against our class, by threats of its withdrawal, and not only threats, so lulling us into servile acquiescence.

Our union must be a combatative, pro-active revolutionary organisation, which uses direct action to achieve its goals.

Its structure is totally different to any reformist or existing working class organisation. However the difference of structure is in itself not enough. The activity and involvement of the union members is still the most important part of any anarcho-syndicalist union. The difference between anarcho-syndicalist and present unions is this basic point: the structure of an anarcho-syndicalist union with its power and decision making at its base, its system of federation and networking means that it can fully utilise what is actually the real power of any working class organisation — vitality and initiative and the day to day involvement of the members.

Current unions squander this vitality. As any active member will show, activity is not based on workplace matters, but wastes time at meetings, futile campaigns, electioneering, and matters arising outside the workplace.

The decision making base of an anarcho-syndicalist union is the workplace. There is only one branch of the union in any workplace as trade divisions are just that — divisive. So anarcho-syndicalism is based on industrial rather than trade divisions. These then link together with other workplaces of the same industry.

This in turn links to a national industrial federation. Workplace unions may link with other unions of any trade in local and area federations for greater local and cross-union solidarity. This would also help create community bases and ties. The locals form the backbone of the union. Together with industrial federations they form the Confederated Union.

An anarcho-syndicalist union has no permanent full time paid officials. Decision making is done via delegates, whilst the running of the union is done by recallable elected people with limited terms. If, as has been known at various times, the workload is so great, a wage may be agreed but only at the holder's previous wage. The practice of an anarcho-syndicalist union, though, is to be as non-bureaucratic and decentralised as possible.

This structure enables effective tactics to be discussed and worked out in the workplace. But the tactics themselves are based on the principles of Anarcho-Syndicalism. Such tactics would t e become relevant with co-ordination for maximum solidarity within the Confederation.

How often have we heard the irrelevant cries from the left to ask the TUC to call a General Strike whenever a group of workers is in struggle. And conversely, how pathetic is the TUC in its tokenistic posturing, calling for 15 minutes 'dignified' stoppages, days of action, birthday parties for the NHS.

People taking industrial action know what is best for their workplace. There are classic examples of effective action, from work to rules to go slows, sabotage, selective and all-out strikes, sabotage.

During the 1989 local government workers' strike there were instance of computers being sabotaged and essential files being locked away to stop any scabs doing the work. French railway workers sabotaging tracks, ambulance workers occupying stations, miners blocking motorways, solidarity actions where, for instance, miners supported nurses, railway workers refused to carry scab coal, and so it goes on. The best methods are those suited to the prevailing situation, and no-one knows that better than the workers involved.

Faced with a violently hostile government, prepared to spend a fortune to win industrial disputes, the all-out and stay-out approach is as archaic as the reformist trade union movement itself. As shown by the miners, P&O Seafarers and the News International printers, holding out month after month was no substitute for class solidarity. Glorious

defeats will not change society or overthrow capitalism. We have to use our experience and imaginations to do whatever is necessary to win. To allow the imagination to flourish, workers must be in control of our own destinies, not pawns in some union leader's power game.

So what is required is the imagination of the workforce coupled with a flexible approach, workforce control and immovable principles, if we are to ensure effective activity.

We also recognise that concerns at work do not end at the factory gates, there have to be links with the communities in which we live. Toxic emissions concern not only workers, but the people living downwind from such plants; poisoned food is eaten by everyone including the workers who produce it; housing matters concern workers and tenants and the homeless; we cannot leave concerns to a few individuals and small sections of workers, or we end up with such debacles as Sellafield, where people have been dying for years whilst government experts say there is nothing wrong, and workers choose to hide their heads in the sand rather than confront the bosses.

This also extends into our international approach. All workers suffer the yoke of capitalism. The environment, multinationals, maldistribution of food, the third world debt, militarism, concerns every one of us and calls for international working class action.

We can no longer, nor could we ever, depend on political leaders to improve our society or our world. The time has come for a radical form of organisation based on internationalism, solidarity and the class war. We can live without the bureaucrats of whatever persuasion.

It is our struggle, it is up to us to organise to win the war now.

On the offensive

Having stated how we perceive an anarcho-syndicalist union and why we see such a development as necessary, the union cannot be built out of thin air or with paper membership, nor can it be linked by economic militancy alone. An anarcho-syndicalist union is not just an economic fighting force, but also an organisation with a political context. To build such a union requires a lot of work and experience. As a step in this direction the DAM is initiating what it calls Industrial Networks.

The idea of an industrial network is a break from the past where rank and file efforts to organise have been within the constraints of the existing social democratic organisations and practices. There have been others that have grown up mainly out of struggle and displayed healthy methods of organisation but as a consequence of their purely reactive nature and limited political content have faded away once the focus of struggle has moved.

An industrial network would initially be a political grouping in the economic sphere, aiming to build a less reactive but positive organisation within the industry. The long

term aim of industrial networks is, obviously, the creation of an anarcho-syndicalist union.

In accordance with this aim, and in keeping with the principles of anarcho-syndicalism we must build a framework from which such a union can be built. To do this the industrial networks must be organised at the grassroots and work through mutual federation with other networks in the same industry to create a national federation within that industry. Also to federate on a local level with networks in other industries to create a locally based organisation. Federation is basically very simple, but because of its flexibility it would be unwise to lay down rigid guidelines as to how to put them into practice. Solidarity and mutual support are the essence of federalism.

It would be a futile leftist prank, of the kind the working class has seen far too much of in the past, if an industrial network was merely a network of contacts. We see no point in industrial networks unless they provide a framework for militant workers to begin to be able to set their own agenda and independence of action. By this we mean that we should be able to choose our own issues and set of demands. Anything short of outright revolution can only negotiate temporary gains under capitalism. The boss class is forever changing the rules, changing its demands, taking away hard fought for benefits. We believe that we should adopt a reciprocal attitude to the bosses. One day we might fight for National Pay Agreements, the next for local ones, the contradiction doesn't bother us. We should fight for what we want, when we want it and not allow the bosses or reformist unions to decide for us what is and is not permissible. This is what we mean by setting our own agenda, even though it may include, from time to time, fighting for the same things as the reformists.

Initially industrial networks are likely to be groupings not necessarily based within the same workplace as this would limit activity, but the issues may be able to be generalised. Local and industry wide issues can be tackled, and being based locally and within the workplace, the members of a Network are ideally positioned to stimulate debate. Network members are also in an excellent position to help break the isolation felt in many workplaces as to the situation in the rest of the industry. The reformist unions maintain an iron grip on information which, especially during disputes, is vital. Workers need an overall view and reliable sources other than the media or union if they are to take effective action. This, along with encouraging workplace organisation, holding local meetings and trying to stimulate solidarity, independence and flexibility of action gives industrial networks a key role to play during disputes.

Networks will always be seeking to grow through activity and action, based upon our principles. Not for its own sake, nor as a mere opposition force to the social-democratic union structures—but as an independent force aiming to become an anarcho-syndicalist union. This obviously brings us on to how we see the relationship an industrial network and its militants have with the existing trade unions.

We make no bones about our attitude to the trade unions. We may be members of them, we may fight for union rights, but we are totally against the present unions, not just their

leadership, but also their structures and aims. We intend to use the unions to suit our own interests, so we defend union rights solely to fight for the rights of the workers. We do not intend to fight for positions within the unions, nor should networks be pushed through branches. To become absorbed within the union, particularly within its hierarchy, is to nullify militancy and flexible thought, with endless meetings that bear no relevance to the workplace or to the members of the union. To us the only organisation capable of representing the workers' interests, has to be workplace and industrially based, especially if it is syndicalist in its outlook. That is, it sees workers' organisations as the only legitimate bodies of expressing the opinions and interests of workers, that bureaucrats and intermediaries are surplus to the requirements of workers as they only serve to control militancy and their own dubious positions.

We have no intention of isolating ourselves from the many workers who make up the rest of the rank and file membership of the unions. We recognise that a large proportion of trade union members are only nominally so as the main activity of the social democratic unions is outside the workplace. Though the industrial networks are fairly specific in so far as they are anarcho-syndicalist and aim to create an anarcho-syndicalist union, they aim, in accordance with anarcho-syndicalist principles, to encourage general workplace activity ie workplace meetings, strike committees, etc, outside of the sphere of influence of the unions and other 'interested' bodies, like political parties.

We would see these activities as broad based, and whilst obviously respecting the consensus, industrial networks would maintain their independence and identity. But it is part of our political/economic outlook to fight vigorously for these kinds of bodies outside of the TU control. We aim to unite and not divide workers.

It has been argued that social democratic unions will not tolerate this kind of activity, and that we would be all expelled and thus isolated. So be it. We, however, don't think that this will happen until there is a threat to the TUs themselves. To present such a threat would imply a degree of success in stimulating workplace activity and building of anarcho-syndicalist networks of militant workers. This in turn would imply that workplace militants had found a voice independent of the TUs and so they become less useful to us anyway. Our aim is not to support social democracy, but to show it up as irrelevant to the working class.

We have claimed that the idea of industrial networks and their combined economic / political outlook are new. And in the history of the last few decades they are. But to be honest, these are only reconstructed ideas from the days when the working class had a bit of clout, before social democracy entwined itself around and strangled our ideas and organisations. They were effective then and can be more so now that social democracy has shown itself for the bankrupt system that it is.

The ambulance workers dispute of 89/90 showed how fully social democracy is willing to sell out workers for short term gains. The trade union was willing to sacrifice the right of workers to strike in return for a settlement. Roger Poole, the union's stitch up man was forever claiming each deal that he got was the best that could be expected, and the final

sell out was so far removed from the workers' demands that Poole had to actively go out and try to sell it to the workers. To us this is utterly absurd.

The railway workers' dispute of 89 was another example of trade unions placing their own interests above those of the workers to protect the positions and egos of the leaders. Knapp gloried in the media attention whilst controlling the effectiveness of the actions taken so that he could settle for an extra 0.1% without a deal on conditions. This kind of increase on the original offer without fulfilling the demands on conditions, some of which were basic demands, shows the ineptitude of the unions' powerbroking and the self inflated importance of the leadership.

Contrast this with the London Underground workers who took action on their own accord and did very well until the trade unions kidnapped the dispute. The workers never really regained the initiative and were thus forced to accept the unions negotiated sellout. A further example of unions nullifying militancy. The last decade or so has been full of similar examples of unions selling deals to its members, counteracting any militancy, total inflexibility and the complete abdication of class interests as they wrangle and cajole to get their feet under the bosses table.

Rank and filism which we have experienced in the recent past is no longer acceptable to us as it entails either political subordination to its inventors, who act as external influences on the organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party and Workers Revolutionary Party being particularly noteworthy examples of external manipulators, or else the Rank and File Groups lack any political outlook and ends up as a permanent critic of the leadership, and nothing more.

We want to encourage genuine grassroots activity, on its own initiative and with its own aims and agenda. But we also want a politically conscious and motivated network of militants both to encourage this and to learn and develop its own independence. Not all members of an anarcho-syndicalist organisation have to be anarcho-syndicalists, they have only to accept the organisational framework and principles. For us this is the only way forward for the class. We must stop the dependence on the petrified corpse of Trade Unionism and stop abdicating political responsibility to the middle class in its Labour Party garb.

A call to arms

The 1990's herald a new decade, we are told that this will be a decade of hope for the future, for freedom and democracy. How easily these assumptions are pulled out of a public relations stock phrase book.

It is difficult to predict the future particularly with the world of capital realigning itself and the very market-hungry forces within it all set to capitalise on the political realignment in Eastern Europe. With the submerging of competing nations to form economic blocks, about to become more formalised in 1992 and the apparent elimination of socialism from the political arena, it is obvious that the world is changing rapidly. But this changing world is the world of capital readjusting itself in its time honoured fashion

of averting perpetual crisis by carving more profit for itself. The avaricious tentacles of capitalism ingesting power and capital and excreting an homogenous culture of coca cola, big macs and prime time TV so destroying working class identity cultures and language in its pursuit of total world capital. Now it seems that this relentless devastation of the planet and the people that live on it can continue unchecked.

The much hailed collapse of socialism, or rather the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of socialism, has added further fuel to the fire of those who see the sole aim of the trade unions and the Labour Party is to accommodate the working class within capitalism rather than destroying capitalism itself. We see nothing in the Marxist-Leninist interpretations of socialism and revolution that is of benefit to the working class. Its combination of historical determinism and elitism led it on an inevitable course of centralisation and rigidity and unashamed dictatorship. The effects of this on the working class of the countries that came under its influence is well documented. We want revolution but not the false idea of some mythical homogenous mass rising to fulfill its historical destiny. This is pure fatalism of the kind that destroys any chance of a genuinely creative force capable of destroying capitalism once and for all. We seek and desire a revolution of the individual and community in harmony, where every member of society feels a part of that society and so plays an active part in it, rather than being a mere cog in a vast machine outside of their control. Capitalism needs to be totally eradicated. To allow ourselves to be accommodated within it as the likes of Kinnock and Willis would have is to destroy our humanity and lose all social responsibility.

The 'Social Charter' advocated by our so-called representatives within the EEC is part of that process of assimilation which highlights their lack of understanding of the needs of the working class. It is solely a tool to enhance the all-powerful super-state and economy of Europe, and as usual leaves us with as little as possible in the attempt to buy us off and accept capitalism. It displays the absolute bankruptcy of the trade unions and the so-called parties of the working class. They no longer have any connection with the day-to-day needs of the working class let alone any desire for revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. A cosy seat on the boardrooms of Europe would seem to be the height of ambition for our brave trade union leaders, the 'fighting organisations of our class'.

The need for an organisation capable of fighting the bosses and of furthering revolution is so starkly obvious that its absence can only further demoralise any rebellious spirit. We want to see a workers' organisation that is both political, economic and internationalist. Any divisions between these are totally artificial. We want the organisation to be controlled by its members, and for it to be a creative force in society.

The idea of class and revolution are deemed antiquated by those in power, particularly those on the left as they have most to lose. The left wing middle class cosy in their homes discussing socialism over quiche and perrier, keeping it for themselves as a nice academic exercise whilst maintaining their control over our class within their positions as union or political leaders or in their university trained occupations.

But we see revolution and class analysis as being more valid than ever. The time has come for the working class to fight back. As the field seems to have been cleared of opponents to capitalism —the trade unions, the Labour Party, and the Marxist-Leninists have all shown their cowardice and inadequacies, so now anarcho-syndicalism will be the potent force for fighting back. It contains all the strengths needed to defeat capitalism and bring about a libertarian communist world.

As we said earlier, the 90's have been heralded as the decade of caring, of hope, of freedom and democracy, but these must be on our terms and we'll have them — BUT NOT WITHOUT A FIGHT

The Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism

- Revolutionary syndicalism is based on the class struggle and holds that all workers must unite in economic combative organisations. These organisations must fight for liberation from the double yoke of capital and the state. Its goal is the reorganisation of social life on the basis of libertarian communism, which will be achieved by the revolutionary action of the working class. Considering that only the economic organisations of the proletariat are capable of reaching this objective, revolutionary syndicalism addresses itself to workers in their capacity as producers, as creators of social wealth, so that it will take root and develop among them in opposition to the modern workers' parties, which it declares inept for the economic reorganisation of society.
- Revolutionary syndicalism is the pronounced enemy of all economic and social monopoly. It aims at the abolition of privilege by the establishing of economic communes and administrative organs run by the workers in the fields and factories, forming a system of free councils without subordination to any power or political party. Revolutionary syndicalism poses as an alternative to the politics of states and parties, the economic reorganisation of production. It is opposed to the governing of people by others and poses self-management as an alternative. Consequently, the goal of revolutionary syndicalism is not the conquest of political power, but the abolition of all state functions in the life of society. Revolutionary syndicalism considers that the disappearance of the monopoly of property must also be accompanied by the disappearance of all forms of domination. Statism, however camouflaged, can never be an instrument for human liberation and, on the contrary, will always be the creator of new monopolies and privileges.
- Revolutionary syndicalism has a twofold function. It carries on the revolutionary struggle in all countries for the economic, social and intellectual improvement of the working class within the limits of present day society. It also seeks to educate the masses so that they will be able to competently manage the processes of production and distribution through the socialisation of all wealth. Revolutionary syndicalism does not accept the idea that the organisation of a social system based exclusively on the producing class can be ordered by simple governmental decrees. It affirms that it can only be obtained through the common action of all manual and intellectual workers, in every branch of industry, by self-

- management, in such a way that every region, factory or branch of industry is an autonomous member of the economic organism and systematically regulates, on a determined plan and on the basis of mutual agreement, the production and distribution processes according to the interests of the community.
- Revolutionary syndicalism is opposed to all organisational tendencies inspired by the centralism of the state and church. These can only prolong the survival of the state and authority and they systematically stifle the spirit of initiative and any independence of thought. Centralism is the artificial organisation which subjects the so-called lower classes to those which claim to be superior. Centralism leaves the affairs of the whole community in the hands of a few — the individual being turned into a robot with regulated movements and gestures. In the centralised organisation, the necessities of society are subordinated to the interests of a few, variety is replaced by uniformity and personal responsibility is replaced by unanimous discipline. It is for this reason that revolutionary syndicalism founds its social conception on a wide federalist organisation, an organisation which works from the bottom to the top by uniting all forces in the defence of common ideas and interests.
 - Revolutionary syndicalism rejects all parliamentary activity and all collaboration with legislative bodies. It holds that even the freest voting system cannot bring about the disappearance of the clear contradictions at the centre of present day society. The parliamentary system has only one goal: to lend a pretence of legitimacy to the reign of falsehood and social injustice.
 - Revolutionary syndicalism rejects all arbitrarily created political and national frontiers and declares that what is called nationalism is the religion of the modern state, behind which is concealed the material interests of the ruling classes. Revolutionary syndicalism recognises only economic and regional differences and demands for all groups the right to self-determination without exception.
 - It is for these reasons that revolutionary syndicalism fights against militarism and war. Revolutionary syndicalism advocates anti-war propaganda and the substitution of permanent armies which are only the instruments of counter-revolution at the service of capitalism, by workers' militias which, during the revolution, will be controlled by the workers' syndicates; it demands, as well, the boycott and embargo of all raw materials and products necessary to war, with the exception of a country where the workers are in the midst of a social revolution, in which case it is necessary to help them defend the revolution. Finally, revolutionary syndicalism advocates the preventive and revolutionary general strike as a means of opposing war and militarism.
 - Revolutionary syndicalism supports direct action and supports and encourages all struggles which are not in contradiction to its own ends. The means of struggle are: occupations, strikes, boycotts, sabotage, etc. Direct action is best expressed through the general strike. The general strike must, at the same time, from the point of view of revolutionary syndicalism, be the prelude to the social revolution.
 - While revolutionary syndicalism is opposed to all organised violence of the state, it realises that there will be extremely violent clashes during the decisive struggles between the capitalism of today and the free communism of tomorrow. Consequently, it recognises as valid that violence which can be used as a means

of defence against the violent methods used by the ruling class during the social revolution. As expropriations of the land and the means of production can only be carried out and brought to a successful conclusion by the direct intervention of the workers' revolutionary economic organisations, defence of the revolution must also be the task of the economic organisations. Defence of the revolution is not the task of a military or quasi-military body developing independently of these economic organisations.

- It is only through the economic and revolutionary organisations of the working class that it will be possible to bring about the liberation and necessary creative energy for the reorganisation of society on the basis of libertarian communism.
- The international bond of struggle and solidarity which unites the revolutionary syndicalist organisations of the world is called the International Workers' Association (IWA).

Ends and Objectives of the IWA

The IWA has as its aims:

- To organise and press for revolutionary struggle in all countries with the aim of destroying once and for all the present political and economic regimes and to establish a libertarian communist society.
- To give a regional and industrial base to the economic syndicalist organisations and, where that already exists, to strengthen those organisations which are determined to fight for the destruction of capitalism and the state.
- To prevent the infiltration of any political party into the economic syndicalist organisations and to combat with resolution every attempt at political domination within the unions.
- Where circumstances demand it, to establish through a given program which is not in contradiction with the above, provisional alliances with other revolutionary and working class organisations, with the objective of planning and carrying out common international actions in the interest of the working class. Such alliances must never be with political parties and with organisations that accept the state as a system of social organisation.
- To unmask and combat the arbitrary violence of all governments against revolutionaries dedicated to the cause of social revolution.
- To examine all problems concerning the world proletariat in order to consolidate and develop movements which defend the rights and new conquests of the working class the world over.
- To undertake shows of solidarity in the event of important economic struggles against the declared or concealed enemies of the working class.
- To give moral and material support to the working class movements whose management is in the hands of the workers themselves.

The International only intervenes in the affairs of a union when its affiliated organisation requests it or when this submits to the general decision of the International.

DAM-IWA Aims and Principles

1. The Direct Action Movement is a working class organisation.
2. Our aim is the creation of a free and classless society.
3. We are fighting to abolish the state, capitalism and wage slavery in all their forms and replace them by self-managed production for need, not profit.
4. In order to bring about the new social order, the workers must take over the means of production and distribution. We are the sworn enemies of those who would take over on behalf of the workers.
5. We believe that the only way for the working class to achieve this is by independent organisation in the workplace and the community and federation with others in the same industry and locality, independent of and opposed to all political parties and trade union bureaucracies. All such workers' organisations must be controlled by the workers themselves and must unite rather than divide the workers movement. Any and all delegates of such workers' organisations must be subject to immediate recall by the workers.
6. We are opposed to all states and state institutions. The working class has no country. The class struggle is worldwide - and recognises no artificial boundaries. The armies and police of all states do not exist to protect the workers of those states, they exist only as the repressive arm of the ruling class.
7. We oppose racism, sexism, militarism and all attitudes and institutions that stand in the way of equality and the right of all people everywhere to control their own lives and environment.
8. The Direct Action Movement is resolved to initiate, encourage and wholeheartedly support the creation of independent workers' unions based on the principles anarcho-syndicalism.
9. The Direct Action Movement is a federation of groups and individuals who believe in the principles of anarcho-syndicalism: a system where the workers alone control industry and the community without the dictates of politicians, bureaucrats, bosses and so-called experts.

The Grassroots Gatherings: Networking a “movement of movements”

<http://www.anarkismo.net/article/6258>

In practice, the Grassroots Gatherings – and groups linked to them – have become the main (and the only continuous) networking of the “movement of movements” in Ireland. To date 10 gatherings have been held between 2001 and 2005. In keeping with the goal of autonomy and decentralisation, there has been no central committee; at the end of each gathering a group of activists has offered to host the next one in their own area and has got on with organising it in their own way, around an agenda set by themselves and with sometimes very different structures and themes.



The worldwide “movement of movements”, which has brought together individual movements fighting neo-liberal capitalism and the “New World Order” since the late 1990s, is a strange kind of animal. Some might say it is less of a single species and more of a symbiotic relationship between several species, or even a mini-ecosystem making its way through the cracks of the world the powerful created.

Metaphors aside, the “movement of movements” consists of several very different kinds of things. It includes a multitude of local campaigns, sometimes organised into large-scale movements around specific issues (opposition to the “war on terror”, fighting resource extraction companies, workplace organising, struggles over women’s rights over their own bodies, movements of peasants and small farmers, intellectual property campaigns, opposition to racism... the list goes on and on).

It includes the high-profile summit protests where the ritual meetings of our rulers are disrupted by direct action, delegitimated by mass demonstrations, critiqued in counter-summits and forced to hide in remote rural areas, dictatorships where protests are banned, behind massive walls or shielded by armies and surface-to-air missiles. And it includes the long, slow process of creating continuity between summit protests, networking between different movements and campaigns, building trust or at least cooperation between different political (and anti-political) traditions: learning to have confidence in ourselves across a whole society or a whole world. The Grassroots Gatherings, which

have been running in Ireland for the last five years, fit in here: a space to meet each other and learn to work together; a place to dance, learn juggling, fall in love and practice for street fighting; a place to work on the issues that divide us and identify what we have in common; a very temporary autonomous zone where the phrase “another world is under construction” is more than just a neat slogan.

From one point of view, part of the job of activists is to build links between individual discontent into local campaigns, to tie together local campaigns into movements around single issues, and to find the common threads shared across those movements. This is where we fight back against the isolation and particularism that capitalism, racism and patriarchy impose on us, and where we start to create possibilities that go beyond changing little things within a big picture that remains the same. Although activists are always doing this, there are times when people are on the defensive in their own lives and the big structures of oppression and exploitation are on the advance, and in these times our efforts to connect are houses built on sand, constantly undermined by the tide of money and power. In other times, such as the last ten years, our own limited efforts connect with the much broader movement of other people’s everyday struggles to change their lives; activists learn from these as well as helping give them shape, and the process feels as though it may be able to change something larger, beyond our own comfort zones.

The movement of movements in Ireland draws on long-standing struggles: community opposition to multinationals, the women’s movement, left and trade union battles, working-class community organising, the counterculture and a huge range of anti-racist, solidarity and self-organised immigrant groups. It also draws on a long history of networking between movements. Its ability to take these processes further depends both on shifting power relations within people’s everyday lives and the broader successes of the movement of movements elsewhere.

Thus Zapatista solidarity goes back to the 1990s, and several Irish activists participated in the two Zapatista-sponsored Encuentros which encouraged networking processes around the world. Irish activists took part in the 2000 World Bank / IMF protests in Prague and the 2001 G8 protests in Genoa, and various events were organised in Ireland around these. Since 2001 Irish involvement in opposing the US administration’s “long war” has grown and shrunk in tandem with the movement elsewhere.

Specific features of the Irish situation include the “Celtic Tiger” and, more broadly, the widespread social change from a post-colonial, semi-peripheral situation in the 1980s to becoming “part of Europe” in terms of salaries (and racism), consumption patterns (and individualism), declining religious power (and the defeat of some elements of old-style patriarchy). Many of those whose hopes for social change did not distinguish between the liberal and radical agendas had to discover for themselves that to become “like other countries” was not enough to bring about equality or justice. Others had to gain the resources and confidence to come out from under the thumb of what had often been, particularly at local level, an intensely disempowering, intimately personal and status-ridden power structure. New kinds of struggles developed – opposing incinerators or bin

taxes, reclaiming the streets or opposing new roads projects – and new kinds of alliances were forged.

In this context, a number of activists – on the suggestion of Irish anarchists – took the initiative of calling a meeting for those involved in the movement from bottom-up points of view. The goal was to “keep campaigns open and decentralised, [get] a radical message across [and avoid] the co-optation, fragmentation and professionalisation of activism”. The invitation defined “bottom-up” as broadly as possible (“grassroots, libertarian, anarchist, participatory, anti-authoritarian”) so as to include community activists, feminists, ecological activists and radical democrats. Those writing and endorsing the letter were mainly anarchists (WSM, ASF, Alliance of Cork anarchists), environmentalists (Gluaiseacht, Free the Old Head of Kinsale, Sustainable Ireland), solidarity activists (Irish Mexico group), community organisers, alternative media (Indymedia, Cyberjournal, The Path, Blue, Rebelweb, A-Infos) and individuals involved in abortion rights, anti-racist work and trade unions. They were based in Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Derry, Limerick, Kildare, Monaghan, Wexford, Down, England and Rome.

At the time the goal was stated as the development of a separate grassroots strand within the movement which would nevertheless be able to cooperate with other strands (NGOs, authoritarian left groups etc.) when appropriate. In practice, the Grassroots Gatherings – and groups linked to them – have become the main (and the only continuous) networking of the “movement of movements” in Ireland. Other attempts have been made (the broader-based Irish Social Forum, the SWP-dominated Global Resistance and Irish Anti-War Movement, some NGO-led conferences) but none has had a continuous and active presence, unlike other countries where these strands are often the dominant ones within the movement.

To date 10 gatherings have been held between 2001 and 2005. In keeping with the goal of autonomy and decentralisation, there has been no central committee; at the end of each gathering a group of activists has offered to host the next one in their own area (the Gatherings are currently stalled because no offer was made at the end of the 10th), and has got on with organising it in their own way, around an agenda set by themselves and with sometimes very different structures and themes.

This means that - rather than the same people being involved in organising every Gathering, or being frowned on if they were unable to do so – the organising teams have been constantly shifting, as has participation at the Gatherings. Not only has this not been a practical problem (indicating the power of bottom-up organising strategies and the growing capacities of activists around the country), but the usual guilt-tripping over participation, and the identification of projects with individuals, seems not to have happened (which means that we are starting to get out of the emotional space of old-style Irish organising). It’s a small example, but against the backdrop of traditional activism in Ireland a telling one.

The general framework of Gatherings has been as a series of discussions; sometimes organised along the style familiar from international anti-capitalist events (opening

plenary and introductions, multiple parallel workshops, closing plenary), sometimes in other ways (discussion sessions where speakers were limited to 5-minute introductions; “Open Space” methodology; practical planning sessions). Around the edges literature has been distributed, mailing lists set up, contacts made, actions organised and new events planned. Much of the “real work”, though, has taken place outside of this structure, in the practicalities of setting up, cooking and cleaning together; childcare and events for children; evening socials; sleeping on other people’s floors; sharing buses or lifts; and coming to recognise each other - beyond theoretical principles and the details of our campaigns – as intelligent, competent, independent activists not too different from ourselves. Participation has varied from about 50 people to about 300, depending on location more than anything else. Of these, at least three quarters at any Gathering I have attended have been activists, people already significantly involved in different campaigns or organisations; while there have been a scattering of people who enjoy gatherings for their own sake, people trying to find a way into activism and overseas visitors, the Gatherings have always been mainly about networking between activists, and numbers need to be assessed in these terms.

This has fed directly in to one of the main goals of the Gatherings, which has been to build alliances by meeting each other outside the pressured situations of organising committees, public meetings and street actions. At the start of the Gatherings, Irish anarchists were already working well together despite theoretical and organisational differences, and links were growing with radical environmentalists around campaigns such as the Glen of the Downs and Reclaim the Streets.

Almost from the foundation, strong connections were made with alternative media (particularly Indymedia), international solidarity (particularly with Latin America), the anti-war movement (particularly its direct action wing). In other areas (the women’s movement, anti-racist and immigrant groups, trade union activism, working-class community organising), while the links are real, they are also relatively small, and the bulk of these movements remains separate from the kinds of alliance represented by the Gatherings. This situation is familiar from the movement of movements in other parts of the English-speaking world in particular and sets it off from that in other parts of Europe (such as France or Italy, where trade unions and immigrant groups have been central parts of the movement), as well as from the rest of the world (such as Latin America or India, where women’s groups and community organising are far more central to the movement).

A second goal, represented by the principles of the Gatherings, has been to develop a specifically bottom-up wing within the movement of movements, defined in ways which can include anarchists, ecologists, feminists, libertarian Marxists, community activists and radical democrats. Probably the details are not too important (to the best of my knowledge the only debate around these has been during the formation of Grassroots Dissent in 2005), but to the extent that they represent a way of working which enables cooperation across our different organisational styles and traditions, they seem mostly to work.

The main criticisms have been around informal realities: domination by older, more articulate activists and masculine operating styles which disempower women. We should not ignore, though, the “voting with your feet” represented by the fact that people from trade union, community, women’s and immigrant / ethnic minority groups (as well as activists in their forties and beyond) rarely come to the Gatherings except as invited speakers or as members of other movements which are present. This may reflect a criticism of organising styles, a sense that the Gatherings are not relevant to their movements, practical issues such as time, travel etc. or a mixture of all three.

The call for the first Grassroots Gathering in 2001 set out a list of principles which have become accepted as a basis for the Gatherings. The basic points are these:

People should control their own lives and work together as equals, as part of how we work as well as what we are working towards. Within the network this means rejecting top-down and state-centred forms of organisation (hierarchical, authoritarian, expert-based, Leninist etc.) The network should be open, decentralised and really democratic.

We call for solutions that involve ordinary people controlling their own lives and having the resources to do so:

- The abolition, not reform, of global bodies like the World Bank and WTO, and a challenge to underlying structures of power and inequality;
- The control of the workplace by those who work there;
- The control of communities by people who live there; We argue for a sustainable environmental, economic and social system, agreed by the people of the planet. We aim to work together in ways which are accessible to everyone, particularly women and working-class people, rather than reproducing feelings of disempowerment and alienation within our own network.

The third, and most important, goal has been to contribute to the development of the movement of movements in Ireland by feeding into the development of local campaigns and movements as well as direct confrontations with the state. Other than direct organisational links (see next section), it’s obviously hard to name which developments can be specifically traced to the Gatherings and which have to do with events in the wider society, the impact of the global movement or the work of other activists and organisations.

What can confidently be said is that the Gatherings have been a significant part of the rise of the movement of movements in Ireland, from a situation where the most that happened locally was events in solidarity with protests and movements elsewhere to the point where the big power structures have been confronted massively – around the cancelled WEF meeting in 2003, the EU summit and Bush visit in 2004; radical, direct action-oriented campaigns with a democratic orientation have grown - around the military use of Shannon airport, the Shell/Statoil project at Rosspoint, other big projects at Tara,

Ringaskiddy and elsewhere; and a host of local campaigns and projects have developed, so that (at least in my own town of Dublin) it has at times taken a monthly meeting just to update each other on everything that is going on in terms of bottom-up organising (from StreetSeen to community gardening, from the anarchy-feminist RAG to anti-racist actions).

Some specific offshoots of “Grassroots” can be identified, where activists have used the Gatherings to develop new campaigns and networks that have taken on a life of their own. Briefly, these include the Grassroots Network Against War, that organised mass direct actions at Shannon airport; a variety of local Grassroots groups (in Dublin, Cork, Belfast and Galway at least); and (in Dublin) the development of Grassroots Dissent and the monthly “Anti-Authoritarian Assemblies” mentioned above from the merger of Dublin Grassroots Network, which organised the Mayday 2004 summit protests, and the Dissent! Group, which organised participation in the Gleneagles 2005 G8 protest. Beyond this, “Grassroots” has come to stand – sometimes positively, sometimes negatively – for a new style of organising in Irish activism: committed to direct action for radical goals, oriented to bottom-up democracy, and connecting activists across all our diversity rather than trying to force everyone to follow a single “line”. Gatherings have been important organising sites for people trying to develop direct action in particular campaigns, building support networks (eg prisoner support, legal action, alternative media), and creating new projects (eg community gardening, squats / social centres).

Although the purpose of the Grassroots Gatherings have been explicitly focussed on discussion, naturally the prospect of imminent action enlivens things wonderfully, and is one area where specific contributions can be named. The June 2003 Dublin Gathering set out to make a bridge between the energy then flying around anti-war activism and the planned WEF regional meeting in Dublin that autumn. That meeting was subsequently cancelled; initially the government cited security reasons but then (perhaps realising that it was not a good idea to tell people that activism could have effects) came up with various other explanations (a report for the meeting was said not to be ready). Given the political capital invested by individuals such as Peter Sutherland and Mary Harney to bring the WEF to Dublin, it seems unlikely that a consultant’s missed deadline would cancel such an expensive meeting. Far more likely is that the 2003 Gathering (said at the time to be the largest libertarian gathering ever held in Ireland) and the more or less simultaneous Irish Social Forum showed sufficient opposition to the WEF that holding it in Dublin Castle as planned would have been a very risky strategy.

The energy developed around planning opposition to the WEF was still available the following year for the formation of Dublin Grassroots Network, which organised a “weekend for an alternative Europe” in opposition to the May EU summit and its politics of Fortress Europe, neo-liberal economics and global warfare. This has been covered extensively by Dec McCarthy in a recent RBR.

In the aftermath of the Mayday protests, DGN and the Gatherings were shaken when one activist was accused of raping another. This brought up issues of personal safety and gender dynamics within the movement, questions of how to deal with internal violence from a grassroots point of view, and a range of power issues as various processes were

improvised to tackle the case. Partly as a response to this, the 8th Grassroots Gathering in Belfast was dedicated to issues of gender and race, and at this and the 9th Gathering in Dublin feminists organised their own, massively-attended workshops around issues such as safe space policies.

Most recently, the 10th Grassroots Gathering was held at Rosspoint Solidarity Camp last year as a way of building support for the campaign and linking rural community-based struggles. In many ways this is exactly what bottom-up gatherings should be for: a tool that local activists can use for their own purposes, rather than a travelling circus or an organisation parachuting into a local area.

The rape case threw up in a very vivid form some of the informal problems which activists in the Gatherings had been aware of without being able to tackle. These can be summarised firstly in terms of participation (relatively few participants from traditional working-class backgrounds or from ethnic minorities, few participants over forty or under twenty, significantly more men than women). Secondly, in terms of internal culture and operating style, there are definite conflicts between the different ways of being that people bring from their own life experience and political practice (more macho cultures of direct action versus softer, less confrontational approaches; more wordy and competitive orientations versus more hands-on and cooperative orientations; a tendency to assume that everyone shares a common history and points of reference versus attempts to be clearer about one's own background and starting point). Thirdly, in terms of political movements, some of Ireland's largest progressive movements (community organising, the women's movement, trade unionism and the self-organisation of ethnic minorities) have relatively little presence at the Gatherings.

Obviously this can be interpreted in different ways, leading to different political conclusions. One is to look at our own internal practice and try to challenge conventional ways of working, to hold "a revolution within the revolution" as the 8th and 9th Gatherings to some extent attempted to do. Another is to see the problem as lying within the broader society and the constraints to political participation faced by women, working-class people and ethnic minorities, leading to underrepresentation and a focus on the most immediately pressing issues; while there is no doubt some truth in this, it says little about what can be done to change things. Alternatively, we can ask questions about the different political focus of these movements (the emphasis placed on working with the state and elites, the role of professional organisers and academics, the fear of disruptive action) and ask in a more focussed way what elements within these movements may be interested in working with bottom-up, direct action-oriented groups trying to build a "movement of movements" – something which has been pursued to some extent in the selection of topics and speakers. This has been attempted particularly in relation to community-based movements, in the preparation of the 5th, 9th and 10th Gatherings.

Here generational questions seem particularly important, as the political experience of dominant groups within each movement (eg feminist academics schooled in the campaigns of the 1980s; community activists who have been through the professionalisation of the 1990s; ethnic minority organisers who are still constructing

their own organisations and finding their feet within Irish politics) mean that we are often looking to speak to minority wings within these movements, who are (still) willing to break the law, who are (still) willing to step outside their own organisational comfort zones, who are willing to explore what for most Irish activists are relatively new ways of organising, and who are interested in being part of the “movement of movements” in ways that go beyond attending conferences or passing motions of support.

For the moment, however, the internal changes of political culture seem easier to affect than broadening the network to include relatively self-confident movements, which in turn seem easier to affect than the broad inequalities of power and resources in Irish society. However, the current pause in Gatherings, and the reorganising of the broader “movement of movements” that is underway in Ireland, should give us the chance to think about how we can tackle all three constructively.

By comparison with these political issues, the (other) practical issues faced by the Gatherings are relatively minor. Probably the biggest one is whether the Gatherings should continue to be a network of existing campaigns or whether, as the movement develops, they should increasingly take on a role as point of first contact, with a focus on education and information – something which would probably reduce the degree of democratic organisation in favour of top-down presentations. However, new activists have to start somewhere, and as the movement of movements grows internationally, it can be easier for people to see the whole picture and then try to find somewhere they can make a difference rather than start from a local campaign and then find their way forward to broader and broader networks.

A second question is geographical. Realistically, only a handful of towns (without naming names!) have continuous libertarian scenes which are able to organise Gatherings – at present, no-one seems to feel able to do so (in some cases because of the pressure of other issues, in some cases because of organisational crisis). At times Grassroots activists have discussed deliberately using Gatherings as a way to help local scenes develop, but so far no such Gatherings – which would logically happen in small towns or extended suburban areas – have happened. Does this mean that libertarian organising will remain a matter of well-connected urban scenes and small networks of individuals elsewhere? Or do Gatherings have a responsibility to help capacity-building and skill-sharing? In Dublin, it seems that the recent anti-authoritarian assemblies and the associated GrassrootsDissent mailing list have to some extent filled the networking place that Gatherings used to fulfil. Something like this might happen elsewhere (Cork? Belfast?) in the future, but will hardly be able to happen even in other cities let alone elsewhere. The geographical issue needs to be taken seriously, however it is answered. A third issue, which to date has been largely fudged, has been that of how decisions are made. This includes the opposition between consensus and voting systems; the extent to which Gatherings are planned in advance by a local team around a theme, left completely open (as with “Open Space” technology) or cobbled together out of whatever workshops people happen to offer. To date, the Gatherings’ focus on discussion rather than decision-making has saved us from total disaster in this area, but these issues have brought up very strong emotions on all sides.

Despite these weaknesses, the Grassroots Gatherings can claim significant achievements, many of which have already been indicated. The Gatherings, and other associated “Grassroots” organisations, are the only network within the movement of movements in Ireland which has had anything like a continuous life, and have contributed significantly to the broader movement (in large-scale protests against the WEF, EU, Bush and G8 as well as in specific struggles at Shannon, Rossport and elsewhere). This contribution has come from sharing skills across movements, identifying common issues which enable cooperation, and glimpsing broader possibilities for social change; it has also come from developing trust among ourselves and supporting the development of local activist capacities (not least through the organisation of a Gathering: it is no small undertaking to host two or three hundred people for an event with several dozen workshops and organise food, accommodation and socials).

Perhaps most importantly, they make visible the “other world” that has been so much talked about in recent years: in the everyday struggles that ordinary people like us engage in to change their situation, in critiques of the official wisdom provided by experts, in our own capacity to organise ourselves and have an effect on the world, in our ability to work together with people who we are supposed to be cut off from by different interests, styles of consumption, ways of being in the world and political traditions. That other world is colourful, problematic, creative, emotional, intelligent, conflict-ridden, interactive and vividly alive in our Gatherings.

This article is of course in part a call to local groups to host another Gathering, and an argument for their continued value. There is a fair amount of work involved in this, but the benefits for a local group, particularly one which is not currently involved in a massive campaign, are significant in terms of revitalising activism, bringing in new people, making links and developing capacity. Another call that needs to be made is for a revival of the Gatherings’ internet presence, which has largely lapsed. A handful of people made an effort last year to gather all the different Gathering websites; the site they built suffered from technical problems and has since disappeared, so that our shared experiences over the last five years are now only recoverable through Google and often overlaid by dating ads

Similarly, the grassroots-network mailing list has largely lapsed, and these days mostly consists of cross-postings from the GrassrootsDissent list. The general pause in holding Gatherings does almost certainly reflect the broader questions about their purpose, achievements and limitations, and what role they should have in the future. My own feeling is that they should act as a point of contact between all the different bottom-up struggles happening nationally (which perhaps means meeting less frequently than before, given how much is happening), that they should consciously aim to extend the network beyond its current limitations (and approach activists in the women’s movement, trade unions, minority groups and community organising not simply as speakers but to ask how we could do this or to organise joint events), and that they should remain primarily an activist-to-activist event, which is ultimately a better way of introducing people to bottom-up activism than organising specifically “educational” events targeted

at people who supposedly know nothing.

The greatest strength of the Gatherings is in the diversity of the movements they bring together; this is always a fragile alliance, dependent on better-organised groups refraining from pushing through their own ways of doing things and pushing others out, and on less well-organised groups pushing to have their voices heard, to make alliances and to create their own space within the broader network rather than retreating to somewhere safer. What was initially an uncertain experiment has become “just how things are”, and we are at risk of taking this achievement for granted and ignoring it or getting on with other things. But if we do this, we also accept that this is as much as we can hope to do together, and abandon the bigger space – of who shapes the world – to the forces of capitalist globalisation, patriarchy, “the long war” and racism to define. The real question is to think beyond what has seemed possible up to now, and to ask what more the movement of movements in Ireland can become.

Grassroots Gatherings to date

- 1) Dublin (Teachers’ Club and Spacecraft), November 2001.
“Global and local: a grassroots gathering”.
- 2) Cork (Cork Autonomous Zone), March 2002.
“Taking back control of our lives”.
- 3) Belfast (Giros), October 2002. (no title)
- 4) Limerick (Locus), March 2003.
“Community, environmental and global justice activism”.
- 5) Dublin (Teachers’ Club), June 2003. (no title)
- 6) Galway (UCG), November 2003. (no title)
- 7) Cork (Mayfield retreat centre), March 2004. (no title)
- 8) Belfast (QUB and around), October 2004.
“Building safe communities, addressing gender bias and racism”.
- 9) Dublin (St Nicholas of Myra community hall), April 2005.
“The death of partnership / what now for grassroots activism?”
- 10) Erris (Rossport Solidarity Camp), August 2005.
“Local community campaigns”

Strategy and struggle - anarcho-syndicalism in the 21st century

<http://libcom.org/library/strategy-struggle-anarcho-syndicalism-21st-century>

A pamphlet produced in January 2009 by Brighton Solidarity Federation as a clarification of the meaning of anarcho-syndicalism in the 21st century, and as a contribution to the debate over strategy and organisation.

PREFACE

Since this document was first circulated, it has provoked both discussion within the Solidarity Federation - where in its current form it represents a minority viewpoint - and also in the wider libertarian class struggle milieu, with reports of discussions from the Netherlands to Eastern Europe to the United States.

We encourage our critics to publish their critiques, for the purpose of furthering the necessary debate over how best to build a libertarian working class movement. For our part, based on comrades criticisms, further historical and primary research and reflections on our own activities in our town and workplaces, we have begun the process of drafting a new, much more comprehensive document to build on the ideas set forth in this pamphlet. Let this document too be subject to intellectual criticism and the cauldron of practice, in order to contribute to new and more effective strategies and tactics.

Brighton SolFed
May 2009

INTRODUCTION

"The spirit of anarcho-syndicalism (...) is characterised by independence of action around a basic set of core principles; centred on freedom and solidarity. Anarcho-syndicalism has grown and developed through people taking action, having experiences, and learning from them (...) the idea is to contribute to new and more effective action, from which we can collectively bring about a better society more quickly. That is the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism."

– **Self Education Collective (2001)**¹

Anarcho-syndicalism is a specific tendency within the wider workers' movement. As a tendency, it has a history of its own dating back over a century. In contemporary discussions many - self-identified advocates and critics alike – take the tradition as it was 50, 70 or 100 years ago as definitive of the tradition as a whole. There is also the fact that the tradition is a plural one, and its core principles have allowed varied, sometimes conflicting practices at differing times in its history. The anarcho-syndicalism of the CNT

of 1930 was not the same as the CNT of 1980. The anarcho-syndicalism of the Friends of Durruti was different yet again. As was that of the FORA. And so on.

What this underlines is the need to clarify exactly what anarcho-syndicalism means in practical terms in a 21st century context. That is the purpose of this pamphlet. This aim will be pursued by way of introducing the current industrial strategy of the Solidarity Federation (SF), with some historical context as well as theoretical clarification of the meaning of a 'revolutionary union', different organisational roles and the relationship between the form and content of class struggle. This theoretical clarification is solely for the purpose of informing contemporary practice, and not some mere intellectual exercise.

So we see anarcho-syndicalism as a living tradition that develops through a critical reflection on our experiences and adaptation to new conditions. It may well be the ideas presented here are not unique to any one tradition of the workers' movement and may find resonance with those who do not identify as anarcho-syndicalists - if anything this is evidence of their validity. This pamphlet is written to contribute to new and more effective action, from which we can collectively bring about a better society more quickly; it is written in the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism.

CLASSICAL ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

"Through the taking over of the management of all plants by the producers themselves under such form that the separate groups, plants, and branches of industry are independent members of the general economic organism and systematically carry on production and the distribution of the products (...) Theirs must be the task of freeing labour from all the fetters which economic exploitation has fastened on it."

- Rudolph Rocker (1938)[2](#)

Anarcho-syndicalism emerged in the late 19th century from the libertarian wing of the workers' movement. Stressing solidarity, direct action and workers' self-management, it represented a turn to the labour movement and collective, class struggle in contrast to the concurrent tendency of individualistic 'propaganda by the deed' – assassinations and terrorist bombings – that had become popular with many anarchists following the massacre of the Paris Commune in 1871.

Classical syndicalists, including many anarcho-syndicalists sought to unite the working class into revolutionary unions. Like the 'One Big Unionism' of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) the goal was to build industrial unions until such a point as they could declare a revolutionary general strike as the prelude to social revolution. However, unlike the IWW on the one hand, and Marxists and social democrats on the other, anarcho-syndicalists rejected the separation of economic (trade union) and political (party) struggles.

They stressed that workers themselves should unite to fight for their interests whether at the point of production or elsewhere, not leave such struggles to the specialists of political parties or union officials or still less neglect political goals such as the overthrow

of capital and the state in favour of purely economic organisation around wages and working hours.³ Furthermore they stressed that workers should retain control of their organisations through direct democratic means such as sovereign mass meetings and mandated, recallable delegates.

The goal of these unions - as suggested in the Rudolph Rocker quote above – was to expropriate the means of production and manage them democratically without bosses. As such, the dominant tendency saw building the union as ‘building the new society in the shell of the old.’ The same directly democratic structures created to fight the bosses would form the basic structure of a new society once the bosses were successfully expropriated.

Consequently, building the union was seen as one and the same as building both the new society and the social revolution that would bring it about. Class struggle became not just a question of (self-)organisation, but of building the organisation. As the union grew to a sufficient size and influence, strikes could be launched, culminating in the revolutionary general strike that would bring about libertarian communism.⁴ There was almost a blueprint for social revolution that simply needed to be implemented.

This approach appeared to be vindicated with the outbreak of the Spanish revolution in 1936 in which the anarcho-syndicalist CNT played a prominent role. In Barcelona, factories, public transport and other workplaces were taken over and self-managed by their workers. In the countryside land was collectivised and libertarian communism proclaimed. However the revolution ended, tragically, in defeat, but not before the paradoxical spectacle of the CNT providing anarchist ministers to the government while it ordered insurgent workers off the streets.

The experience of Spain led to many criticisms of classical anarcho-syndicalism in addition to those which had already been made during its development in the early 20th century. To these criticisms we will now turn.

CRITICISMS OF CLASSICAL ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

"The modern proletarian class does not carry out its struggle according to a plan set out in some book or theory; the modern workers' struggle is a part of history, a part of social progress, and in the middle of history, in the middle of progress, in the middle of the fight, we learn how we must fight..."

– **Rosa Luxemburg (1918)**⁵

Criticisms have come from many quarters. We will focus here on four in particular which have relevance to developing anarcho-syndicalist practice as they share our goal of libertarian communism (unlike say, social democratic criticisms). Addressed in order of their severity, these four criticisms are: those which emerged from within - at the height of the Spanish revolution in the form of the Friends of Durruti group; those from the platformist tradition that grew out of the lessons of the 1917 anarchist revolution in the Ukraine; those which came from the council communist tendency in the workers'

movement, and in particular Rosa Luxemburg; and finally those which, for want of a better term emanate from the contemporary ‘ultra-left’ and Gilles Dauvé in particular.

The Friends of Durruti’s criticisms

The Friends of Durruti (FoD) were a group of rank-and-file CNT militants during the Spanish revolution in 1936-7. Their main criticism was that having defeated the army and taken the streets and workplaces, the CNT didn’t know where to go. *“The CNT did not know how to live up to its role. It did not want to push ahead with the revolution with all of its consequences (...) it behaved like a minority group, even though it had a majority in the streets.”*⁶ The CNT simply started self-managing the workplaces and collaborating with the remnants of the state, rather than decisively smashing the state and moving towards libertarian communism. For the FoD, the CNT lacked two things: *“a program, and rifles.”*

Platformist criticisms

In many ways platformist criticisms are similar to those of the FoD; whilst supporting the structures of anarcho-syndicalist unions they stress the need for a specific libertarian communist organisation to argue for a communist program within such mass organisations. This organisation would be a single ‘general union of anarchists’ and be founded on four organisational principles; theoretical unity, tactical unity, collective responsibility and federalism.⁷

In contrast to classical anarcho-syndicalism, contemporary platformism seeks not to build mass organisations, but to insert into them and influence them in an anarchist direction. For example the position paper on trade unions by the influential platformist Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) states that *“no matter how conservative they can become, it does not alter the fact that they are the most important mass organisations of the working class (...) activity within them is an extremely important ongoing activity.”*⁸ Consequently, they advocate reforming the existing Trade Unions towards anarcho-syndicalist structures of mandated recallable delegates, rank-and-file control etc.⁹

Council communist criticisms

For Rosa Luxemburg, anarcho-syndicalists had an undialectical view of revolution where they could build up their organisation, the one big union, set the date for the revolutionary general strike and that would be it. There was no space for spontaneity, or for learning from struggle and adapting the forms accordingly; the anarcho-syndicalist union was taken as a given. She contrasted the anarchist general strike to the mass strike, a more spontaneous expression of class struggle not called by any one group.

Her ruminations on the mass strikes in Russia – which she claimed were *“the historical liquidation of anarchism”*¹⁰ - led her to formulate a ‘dialectic of spontaneity and organisation.’ For Luxemburg, organisation was *born in the midst of class struggle*, she held the anarcho-syndicalists put the organisation before struggle; they thought building the union was the same as building the revolutionary struggle, since it was the union that would call the revolutionary general strike.

Ultra-left criticisms

Communist writer Gilles Dauvé has been particularly critical of anarcho-syndicalism. Whilst the Friends of Durruti and the platformists saw the failures of anarcho-syndicalism as stemming from the absence of a clear communist program, and Rosa Luxemburg and the council communists from a proscriptive disconnect from unforeseen, spontaneous developments of the class struggle, Dauvé argues the problems are far more fundamental. He writes that

“‘You can’t destroy a society by using the organs which are there to preserve it (..) any class who wants to liberate itself must create its own organ’, H. Lagardelle wrote in 1908, without realizing that his critique could be applied as much to the unions (including a supposed revolutionary syndicalist French CGT on a fast road to bureaucratisation and class collaboration) as to the parties of the Second International. Revolutionary syndicalism discarded the voter and preferred the producer: it forgot that bourgeois society creates and lives off both. Communism will go beyond both.”¹¹

Furthermore he argues that *“the purpose of the old labour movement was to take over the same world and manage it in a new way: putting the idle to work, developing production, introducing workers’ democracy (in principle, at least). Only a tiny minority, ‘anarchist’ as well as ‘marxist’, held that a different society meant the destruction of the State, commodity and wage labour, although it rarely defined this as a process, rather as a programme to be put into practice after the seizure of power.”¹²*

CONTEMPORARY ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

"Not only did the great determination and ingenuity on the part of the [Puerto Real] workers bring results, but that of the communities too. Mass assemblies both in the yards and surrounding localities involved workers, their families, neighbours and all supporters. Initiating and maintaining entire communities' involvement in mass assemblies alone was fine achievement."

– **Solidarity Federation (1995)**¹³

There are numerous examples of contemporary anarcho-syndicalist practice, from the small group organising in Germany and the Netherlands described in FAU Bremen’s ‘Notes from the class struggle’ pamphlet,¹⁴ to the McDonalds Workers Resistance network¹⁵ to recent struggles in Spain, Australia and elsewhere. However, we will focus on two examples that go beyond the limits of the classical anarcho-syndicalism we have considered thus far, and illustrate elements of contemporary practice which are emphasised in the SF’s industrial strategy. These two examples are the struggles around the shipyards in Puerto Real, Spain in 1987, and the Workmates collective that existed amongst track maintenance workers in London in the early part of this decade.

Puerto Real

When the Spanish government announced a programme of 'rationalisation' at the Puerto Real shipyards, the workforce came out on strike. The CNT was at the forefront in

spreading the action to the surrounding population. Not only was the government defeated, but a number of pay and condition improvements were secured. The most noteworthy development was the spread of mass assemblies both in the shipyards and the surrounding communities. These assemblies were the sovereign bodies of the struggle, controlling it from the bottom up. People decided for themselves, rejecting control by unaccountable politicians, union officials or 'experts' and ensuring control remained in the workplace and locality.

These bodies reflected the kind of 'dialectic of spontaneity and organisation' that Rosa Luxemburg declared anarchism "liquidated" a century ago for lacking. The CNT did not seek to get everyone in the shipyards and surrounding communities to join it and then declare a strike (although their levels of membership and longer-term agitation certainly contributed to their influence), but when the rationalisations were announced they sought instead to initiate mass assemblies open to all workers regardless of union membership, whilst arguing for the core anarcho-syndicalist principles of solidarity, direct action and rank-and-file control.

Workmates

Workmates began as a handful of militants working in various track maintenance and engineering jobs on the London Underground in 2002. These included track installers, track welders, crossing makers, carpenters, ultrasonic rail testers, track vent cleaning gangs, along with lorry drivers. In February 2003, a meeting attended by around 150 workers voted unanimously to move from being a loose collective of RMT members and set up a delegate council along anarcho-syndicalist lines.¹⁶ Each 'gang' of workers (typically between 8 and 12) elected a recallable delegate and mandated them to sit on the delegate council.

LUL used a large number of casualised agency staff, most of whom were non-unionised. These workers were also included in the Workmates collective, which was independent of the RMT and open to all workers at LUL (minus scabs and management). The initial struggle Workmates was involved with was resistance to the privatisation of LUL and concomitant attacks on working conditions this entailed. While LUL was privatised, Workmates subsequently scored several victories over working practices after mass meetings organised work-to-rules and delegates consulted with their gangs to plan further action.¹⁷

However, there were also some defeats. These, coupled with high staff turnover meant that the levels of participation and struggle were not sufficient to sustain the delegate council structure. Consequently Workmates waned back to being a residual network of militants rather than an independent union, however a legacy of canteen mass meetings whenever a dispute arises remains, and the levels of solidarity are still high, as demonstrated by the level of support for a militant recently victimised by management in the depot where workmates is centred, which helped force an embarrassing climb-down.¹⁸

ON FORM AND CONTENT (THE PRIMACY OF STRUGGLE)

"Communist revolution is the creation of non-profit, non-mercantile, co-operative and fraternal social relations, which implies smashing the State apparatus and doing away with the division between firms, with money as the universal mediator (and master), and with work as a separate activity. That is the content... this content won't come out of any kind of form. Some forms are incompatible with the content. We can't reason like the end was the only thing that mattered: the end is made out of means."

– Gilles Dauvé (2008)[19](#)

Anarcho-syndicalism is commonly associated with particular organisational forms, namely revolutionary unions, mass meetings and mandated, recallable delegate councils. But it cannot be forgotten that these forms are necessarily the *expression* of some content. This is much like how a pot-maker can fashion many forms from a single lump of clay, but cannot fashion anything without the clay to start with. Structure requires substance, content precedes form. However we are not philosophers interested in such niceties for their own sake, but for their practical implications. So what is this content to which anarcho-syndicalism seeks to give form?

Simply, it is class struggle. Conflict between classes is immanent to capitalism, since capital is defined by our exploitation. We understand class struggle as *a process of self-organisation* to collectively advance our concrete, human needs as workers. Since these needs are in conflict with the needs of capital accumulation, the rejection of inhuman conditions carries with it the seed of a future human community; libertarian communism, the revolution described by Dauvé above. With the Workmates collective, we have an example of this content – a certain level of militancy – being given an anarcho-syndicalist form; a form which subsequently dissipated as the level of militant participation ebbed with high staff turnover and several telling defeats.

So while class struggle has primacy over the particular forms it takes, which are only means to advance our concrete needs and ultimately establish a society based on those needs, we do seek to give this struggle particular forms. These forms cannot be created from scratch, but we can seek to give disparate content a particular form, in turn focussing and developing that content. This is where the pot-maker analogy breaks down, because some forms sustain and expand the struggle while others strangle and suppress it. The relationship is *dialectical* in that the particular form the struggle takes in turn affects the development of the struggle. Since it is the class struggle that will create libertarian communism, we must always give it primacy over the needs of particular organisational forms. This was a lesson drawn by the Friends of Durruti when they found themselves facing expulsion from the CNT for advocating revolutionary struggle against the state of which it had become a part.

SOME NECESSARY DISTINCTIONS

"The most important thing that I would to point out, is that [in Puerto Real] we managed to create a structure whereby there was a permanent assembly taking place. In other words decisions within this particular conflict were made by those people who were

directly involved in the conflict."
– **Pepe Gomez, CNT (1995)**[20](#)

Before we can proceed further, we will need to make three conceptual distinctions. The reasons for such precision will become apparent in the following sections, as well as for properly understanding the Industrial Strategy which completes this pamphlet.

Permanent/non-permanent organisations

Pepe Gomez above describes the assemblies in Puerto Real as “permanent”, yet he also notes how they were an expression of a “particular conflict.” Perhaps ‘*regular*’ captures this meaning better in English. We would define a permanent organisation as one which endures between cycles of struggle – political parties, trade unions and anarchist propaganda groups are all permanent organisations. We would define non-permanent organisations as those which are inexorably the expression of a certain level of struggle and cannot outlive it without becoming something else entirely. The assemblies described by Pepe Gomez would fit into this category. For us therefore *regular* meetings do not equal *permanent organisation*.

Mass/minority organisations

We call a *mass organisation* one which is open to essentially all workers in whatever area it operates (we would call a *popular organisation* one open to all people, regardless of class). We call a *minority organisation* one which maintains specific, usually political criteria of membership which preclude some from joining. A trade union is an example of a mass organisation. A political group such as the Solidarity Federation is a minority organisation, since it requires agreement with specific, revolutionary aims and principles which are necessarily minority views outside of revolutionary upsurges. Some of the anti-war groups in 2002-4, at least those which organised via open public meetings as was the case in Brighton would be examples of a popular organisations.

Revolutionary/pro-revolutionary organisations

The final distinction we must draw is between *revolutionary* and *pro-revolutionary* organisations. We call revolutionary organisations those which are actually capable of making a revolution. These are necessarily mass organisations since no minority can make a revolution on behalf of the class – the pitfalls of such Leninist vanguardism are well known and don’t need repeating here. We call pro-revolutionary organisations those which are in favour of revolution but which are in no position to make it themselves. Propaganda groups would be an example of this. We do find the term ‘pro-revolutionary’ less than ideal, and in fact something like ‘agitational’ might be better. However this doesn’t immediately capture the relationship of the organisation to revolution that we are trying to convey.

ORGANISATION AND ORGANISATIONAL ROLES

"To organise is always a necessity, but the fixation on your own organisation can be perilous. Against that we believe in the diversity of groups and organisations, that arises from different situations and fulfil different needs in the flow of class struggle. Some are

more temporary, while others are continuous."

– Riff Raff (1999)[21](#)

We can use the distinctions in the previous section to identify four ideal types of organisation. Of course many different forms of organisation are possible, but only some are of interest to anarcho-syndicalists since only some offer the potential to develop the class struggle both in the here-and-now and ultimately in the direction of social revolution and libertarian communism. Now while these are *ideal types* and therefore not all actually existing organisations fit neatly into one category or the other, they do identify the *real tensions* present in organisations that try to defy the logic inherent to their particular organisational form. We will discuss real-world examples below to help illustrate the argument.

Mass, permanent organisations

Mass, permanent organisations are by definition de-linked from the levels of militancy of their members and class struggle more broadly. Therefore, they are not expressions of the *self-organisation* of workers sought by anarcho-syndicalists, but for the *representation* of workers as workers. We therefore recognise that neither trade unions or so-called mass workers' parties are revolutionary organisations. In the case of trade unions, their structural role as representatives of labour power within capitalism compels them to offer disciplined workforces to the employers.

If they cannot offer the promise of industrial peace, they are in no position to negotiate. Such social partnership is inherent to the idea of mass, permanent workers representation, de-linked from class struggle. Furthermore, they divide up the class by trade and in addition to their structural limitations are bound by a host of laws just to make sure they fulfil this function, such as restrictions on secondary action and the notice needed for industrial action, all on pain of the sequestration of funds and imprisonment of officials.

If levels of militancy are low, trade unions work hand-in-hand with management to impose cuts and restructuring. If levels of struggle are higher, they will posture more militantly and operate as a *limited expression* of that struggle in order to appear to workers to really 'represent' their interests, calling tokenistic one-day strikes and suchlike. There are numerous recent examples.[22](#) As and when such struggles begin to take on a self-organised character and go beyond the institutional and legal limits of the trade union form - by the development of mass meetings, wildcat action, flying pickets etc – two things can happen. The trade union will either come into conflict with the workers (as in the isolation of the Liverpool postal wildcat during the national strikes of 2007[23](#)), or effectively cease to exist as a permanent organisation as it is superseded by the structures of mass meetings and the like, which as expressions of the level of militancy represent a non-permanent, potentially revolutionary supersession of the mass/permanent trade union form.

Consequently, we hold that not only are permanent mass organisations not revolutionary, but that in the final analysis they are *counter-revolutionary* institutions (note, we are not saying trade *unionists* are counter-revolutionary, the institutions are). The counter-

revolutionary nature of trade unions does not arise from bad leadership, bureaucratisation and a lack of internal democracy, rather the leadership, bureaucratisation and lack of internal democracy arise from the logic of permanent mass organisations representing workers as workers. As revolutionary forms are necessarily the expression of class struggle and so necessarily non-permanent, the de-linking of form from content represents a counter-revolutionary inertia.

Of course it does not follow that we reject membership or activity within the trade unions, as their ultimately counter-revolutionary nature does not mean revolution would break out tomorrow if they suddenly ceased to be. Rather, the unions only act as a brake on struggles when they develop a degree of self-organisation in contradiction to the permanent form. Until that point, they do act as a limited expression of struggles precisely to secure their role as representatives. Consequently as workers we think it makes sense to be union members in workplaces where a trade union is recognised.

But as anarcho-syndicalists we hold no illusions in reforming them in accordance with our principles; instead arguing for, and where possible implementing, an anarcho-syndicalist strategy of mass meetings, mandated recallable delegates, delegate councils and secondary solidarity action regardless of the wishes of the union. Reforming the trade unions would be a waste of time, because the very level of self-organisation required to force such reforms would render the reforms themselves redundant, since we'd already be doing the things independently we were lobbying to be allowed to do. In workplaces where there is no recognised union, we advocate alternative structures, which will be discussed below.

Minority, permanent organisations

These are the kinds of organisation familiar to us today. There are two distinct pro-revolutionary roles for minority permanent organisations of interest to anarcho-syndicalists: propaganda groups and networks of militants. We see these as two distinct roles that organisations can fulfil. This could be attempted as a single organisation – as is the case with the SF's current attempts to operate a dual structure of locals and industrial networks – or separate organisations, each focusing on its own role. We will elaborate our preference in the following 'how we see it' section, for now it is sufficient to understand that within a given type of organisation there can be distinct roles. We do not find it useful to refer to any kind of minority organisation - even an industrial/workplace one - as a union as in English in particular this has the connotations of mass organisations, for which we reserve the term.

Minority, non-permanent organisations

This type of organisation essentially mirrors minority/permanent ones, except that they will be created out of the needs of the class struggle at given times and places rather than being something we could have a general strategy for building. Examples would be the Friends of Durruti as a hybrid propaganda group/network of militants, and arguably workplace groups like McDonalds Workers Resistance,²⁴ the informal social networks of 'faceless resistance' described by the Swedish communist group Kämpa Tillsammans, here." href="#footnote25_pd5nr10">25 or some of the groups of anti-war

activists that formed during the upsurge in anti-war sentiments in 2002-3. On account of their varied and non-permanent nature the only strategic approach to such organisations we can offer is to support them where they form and to try and create them in our own workplaces or localities as and when conditions permit.

Mass, non-permanent organisations

Mass, non-permanent organisations are a product of a certain level of class struggle, and therefore they cannot simply be built piecemeal by recruitment. For us, these organisations are the only type that are potentially revolutionary, as they are the mass expression of heightened class conflict. The organisations we can build in the present are the pro-revolutionary, minority ones, which can network, propagandise and agitate to develop the class struggle and give it anarcho-syndicalist forms as it develops. We think failure to recognise the fundamental difference between mass revolutionary organisations and minority pro-revolutionary organisations can only lead to practical confusion and demoralisation. Only if we recognise the relationship of organisation to class struggle can we be clear about what is possible and practical in the here and now and also how this gets us closer to the mass, revolutionary unions we want to see (more on which in the following section ‘how we see it’).

Reprise

It must be borne in mind that these four organisational types are to a certain extent idealised ones. In reality, groups exist that are in fact combinations of them. However these ideal types represent *real* tensions. For instance the paradox of a mass, directly democratic revolutionary organisation in times when the majority of workers are not pro-revolutionary places real limits on the size of attempts to create revolutionary unions in the here and now. Take for example the split between the Spanish CNT and the CGT over participation in state-run class collaborationist works councils.

The departure of the Swedish SAC from the International Workers Association (IWA) for similar reasons also reflects this paradox: internal democracy in a mass organisation when the majority of workers are not pro-revolutionary means the organisation has to sacrifice either internal democracy or its revolutionary principles – either way breaking with anarcho-syndicalism - the only other alternative being implausibly successful internal education to turn all members into pro-revolutionaries. Furthermore, the very co-existence of revolutionary organisations with the state is a necessarily unstable, temporary situation of dual power, they either make a revolution, are repressed, or accommodate themselves to legal existence as a regularised trade union.

Consequently while the organisational types we have described are not definitive of all actually-existing organisations, they do demonstrate the distinct types that exist and the tensions present within organisations that try to combine them. The paradox is only resolved with increased levels of class struggle and class consciousness – hence revolutionary unions are necessarily non-permanent products of struggle, and attempts to maintain them beyond the struggle of which they are an expression will see them lapse into a counter-revolutionary role. Without militant struggle they couldn’t but become

organs for the representation of workers within capitalism, not the ultimate abolition of the working class.

OUR NOTION OF REVOLUTION

"A libertarian communist economy, a system without the market and where everyone has equal rights to have their needs met, has always been the aim of anarcho-syndicalists. Workers' self-management would amount to little in a world of inequality with decisions being dictated by the market."

– **Solidarity Federation (2003)**[26](#)

Anarcho-syndicalists are libertarian communists. Without this communist perspective, anarcho-syndicalism would amount to little more than democratic trade unionism for a self-managed capitalism. Communists recognise that capitalism is not simply an undemocratic mode of management, but a *mode of production*. Making it more democratic doesn't make it any more responsive to human needs so long as money, commodity production and exchange persist. Consequently, against Rudolph Rocker's classical position quoted earlier in this pamphlet, our notion of revolution is not simply the taking over of production in order to self-manage it democratically, but a simultaneous process of *communisation* – restructuring social production around human need.

This entails not the *liberation* of the working class envisaged by Rocker, but our *abolition* as a class and with it the negation of all classes. It also implies not the democratisation of work but its abolition as a separate sphere of human activity. Much activity - waged or not - that is potentially rewarding in itself is reduced to repetitive, alienating work by the requirements of capital accumulation. We don't want democratically self-managed alienation, but its abolition. Furthermore - and this is of practical import to anarcho-syndicalists – whole sectors of the economy need to be abolished altogether, while those that remain need to be radically transformed in terms of the division of labour and the nature of productive activity itself.

This is significant, since while for example mass assemblies of call centre or financial services workers will likely be a part of any revolutionary upsurge, outbound call centres and finance have no place in a libertarian communist society. In parts of the UK these sectors account for nearly half of all employment. But at some point these assemblies would be deciding to dissolve themselves as part of the process of reorganising production around human needs, a process which *constitutes* social revolution. This once again demonstrates the limitations of the classical approach stressing the goal of self-management alone and reaffirms the need to state clearly and unequivocally that we are communists and that *social revolution is a process of communisation*.

HOW WE SEE IT

"We want a society based on workers' self-management, solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism. That society can only be achieved by working class organisations

based on the same principles - revolutionary unions (...) Revolutionary unions are means for working people to organise and fight all the issues - both in the workplace and outside."

– **Solidarity Federation Constitution (2005)**[27](#)

As we have seen, an anarcho-syndicalist union isn't just a really democratic trade union, but an altogether different beast with an altogether different purpose. Permanent mass organisations such as trade unions exist as things which organise workers. By contrast, the revolutionary unions advocated by anarcho-syndicalists are *an expression of a process of workers' self-organisation* at its higher points. Therefore if we want to see these organisations, we have to agitate to build the class struggle itself, and for it to take these forms as and when class militancy develops sufficiently. 'Building the union' per se literally makes no sense, and represents a fetishism of form that forgets that the form can only ever be an expression of content, of class struggle.

For us, a revolutionary union is necessarily non-permanent because it is an expression of a given wave of class struggle. It cannot outlive the struggle of which it is an expression without becoming something fundamentally different, something *counter-revolutionary*, precisely because anarcho-syndicalist unions are *defined* by militant participation, direct action, solidarity and rank-and-file control. The particular form such unions entail is mass assemblies open to all workers (minus scabs and managers), and mandated recallable delegates forming delegate councils to co-ordinate the struggle. Federation by region and/or industry would also be advised as the numbers of such assemblies grew.

In order to develop the class struggle in a direction where such revolutionary unions are possible, we see two distinct organisational roles to enable anarcho-syndicalists to engage in direct action in the here-and-now. These are libertarian communist propaganda groups (of which anarcho-syndicalist propaganda groups are a subset), and networks of militants (of which *industrial* networks are a subset, on which we will focus).

In contrast to a platformist 'general union of anarchists' or left communist 'single proletarian party' we take a more pluralist approach to propaganda groups. While we are opposed to needless duplication of effort and resources, we are also opposed to the false unity that often accompanies attempts to unite everyone into one single political organisation. If there are real political differences between groups, they should organise independently. This does not however preclude practical co-operation on concrete projects of common interest. Consequently, while we clearly believe strongly in our ideas and seek to persuade others of them, with regard to propaganda groups we advocate an approach of non-sectarian pluralism and fraternal co-operation wherever possible to spread libertarian communist ideas and develop the class struggle.

In terms of propaganda, our goal is twofold: both to win other pro-revolutionaries to our positions and tactics, and to promote anarcho-syndicalist tactics and libertarian communist ideas amongst the wider class. The most obvious means of the former is the production of pamphlets and engaging in debates with the wider pro-revolutionary milieu – if we are confident in our ideas we should not fear an open confrontation of them with

others. The latter goal of spreading our ideas amongst the wider class entails activities like producing and distributing strike bulletins on picket lines or distributing propaganda at workplaces facing redundancies, as well as maintaining accessible online information and holding public meetings.

As to industrial networks, we see membership of these as less determined by ideas and more by economic position (being a militant in a particular industry). Of course a level of theoretical and tactical agreement is required – networks are not apolitical - but we do not see this as being as high as for propaganda groups. For example it would be foolish not to organise with other militants because they have a different understanding of revolution, or are yet to be convinced of its necessity, but nonetheless support direct action, mass meetings and rank-and-file control of struggles.

Consequently we believe membership of a political organisation should not be a precondition of joining an industrial network as it represents an unnecessary barrier to the establishment and growth of such networks. Therefore we see the development of such networks as a concrete project for practical co-operation with other pro-revolutionary groups and non-aligned individuals who also see the need for them. The role of these networks would be to produce industrially specific propaganda and agitate industrially for direct action, solidarity and rank-and-file control. In the immediate term this means invisible, ‘faceless resistance’, but the goal is to foster open conflict controlled by mass meetings of all workers.

This may seem to represent a separation of political and economic organisation alien to anarcho-syndicalism. We do not agree. Both organisational roles address both ‘economic’ and ‘political’ issues of interest to the class, whether wages and conditions or border controls and the availability of abortions. The only separation is one which is a material fact of capitalist society – we share an economic position with fellow workers who may well be militant without sharing all our political ideas. We simply say this should not be a barrier to common action, only that it should be recognised and organisations structured accordingly. We believe the propaganda group/industrial network roles are a means of achieving this.

Finally, we should say that the list of activities given as examples for each type of organisation is not exhaustive. There are for example times when either type could engage in forms of direct action either to support its members or to support other workers in struggle who for whatever reason cannot take certain forms of action themselves. London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP) would also be an example of a group that engages in direct action both outside the workplace and beyond just propaganda." href="#footnote28_msn5gm">28 The possibilities thrown up by the class struggle cannot all be known in advance, and it would be foolish to try and prescribe exactly and exhaustively what each organisation should do. Instead, we seek only to describe the *kinds* of organisation that can advance the class struggle and move us closer to libertarian communism.

SOLIDARITY FEDERATION INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

The Solidarity Federation seeks to create a militant opposition to the bosses and the state, controlled by the workers themselves. Its strategy can apply equally to those in the official trade unions who wish to organise independently of the union bureaucracy and those who wish to set up other types of self-organisation.

Rank and file control

Decisions should be made collectively. This means they are made by mass meetings, not by officials in union offices. These mass meetings include all those in the workplace, regardless of union membership. It will not, however, include scabs or managers.

Anyone we elect to negotiate with management should have a mandate from the workforce that gives them clear guidance on what is and is not acceptable. Mass meetings of workers need to be able to recall all delegates.

Direct action

Direct action at work means strikes, go-slows, working-to-rule, occupations and boycotts. We are opposed to the alternative which is 'partnership' with bosses. Workers can only win serious concessions from management when industrial action is used or when bosses fear it might be.

Solidarity

Solidarity with other workers is the key to victory. Workers should support each others' disputes despite the anti-trade union laws. We need to approach other workers directly for their support. 'Don't Cross Picket Lines!'

Control of funds

Strike funds need to be controlled by the workers themselves. Officials will refuse to fund unlawful solidarity action. Union bureaucrats use official backing and strike pay to turn action on and off like a tap.

Unions use a large proportion of their political funds on sponsoring parliamentary candidates. Backing the Labour Party is not in the interests of workers. We should also not fall into the trap of backing so-called 'socialist' candidates. The Parliamentary system is about working class people giving up power and control, not exercising it.

Social change

The interests of the working class lie in the destruction of capitalist society. The whole of the wealth of society is produced by the workers. However, a portion of this is converted into profits for the shareholders and business people who own the means of production. When workers make wage demands, they are simply trying to win a bigger share of what is rightfully their own.

This means that trade union organisation around traditional bread and butter issues is not enough on its own, although it is vital. As well as a structure of mass meetings and delegates there also needs to be a specifically anarcho-syndicalist presence in any workplace organisation. This will necessarily involve only a minority of workers in the

present time. The role of anarcho-syndicalist militants is not to control the workplace organisation but to put forward an anarcho-syndicalist perspective in the meetings of the workplace organisation and attempt to gain broad support for our aims and principles, through propaganda work.

Preamble

Solidarity Federation's ultimate aim is a self-managed, stateless society based on the principle of from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. It is a society where we are no longer just used as a means to an end by bosses wanting to make money from our labour.

In the medium term and as an essential forerunner to such a society, SolFed promotes and seeks to initiate anarcho-syndicalist unions. To this end, SolFed seeks to create a militant opposition to the bosses and the state, controlled by the workers themselves. Its strategy can apply equally to those in the official trade unions who wish to organise independently of the union bureaucracy and those who wish to set up other types of self-organisation.

Details of the strategy

Mass meetings should be seen as an alternative structure to official union structures that are dominated by full-time bureaucrats. Decisions are made collectively in these assemblies. The work of these assemblies in different workplaces should be co-ordinated by delegate councils.

In the most militant workforces regular mass meetings will be held and this is obviously the ideal we are aiming at. This may not be possible in other workplaces where it will only be possible to organise such meetings when a dispute arises.

We need a three-pronged approach to the business of actually setting up an independent organisation at work.

1. In a workplace with a recognised TUC union, an SF member would join the union but promote an anarcho-syndicalist strategy. This would involve organising workplace assemblies to make collective decisions on workplace issues. However, workers will still be likely to hold union cards here to avoid splits in the workplace between union members and non-union members.
2. In a non-unionised workplace, independent unions, based on the principle of collective decision-making, should be set up wherever possible.
3. In a non-unionised workplace, that is difficult to organise due to a high turnover of staff or a large number of temps, we should just call workers assemblies when a dispute arises.

SF members will also undertake anarcho-syndicalist propaganda work in each scenario. The principles of our industrial strategy would apply to all three approaches.

1. [1. http://www.selfed.org.uk/units/2001/index.htm#24](http://www.selfed.org.uk/units/2001/index.htm#24)

2. [2](http://www.chomsky.info/books/state01.htm). Cited in <http://www.chomsky.info/books/state01.htm>
3. [3](#). "The anarcho-syndicalists also saw the need to combine the political and the economic struggle into one. They rejected pure economic organisation and insisted that the revolutionary union should have a clear political goal, the overthrow of capitalism and the state." - <http://www.solfed.org.uk/booklets/british-anarcho-syndicalism.htm>
4. [4](#). "Every strike, whether successful or not, was seen to increase the hostility between the classes and so stimulate further conflict. Strikes encourage feelings of solidarity and are a training ground for further struggles. The climax would be, after a long series of strikes growing in breadth and intensity, the revolutionary 'general strike'." - <http://www.solfed.org.uk/booklets/british-anarcho-syndicalism.htm>
5. [5](#). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_Luxemburg#Dialectic_of_Spontaneity_and_Organisation [In a Revolutionary Hour: What Next?, Collected Works 1.2, p.554]
6. [6](#). Quoted in <http://www.spunk.org/texts/places/spain/sp001780/chap8.html>
7. [7](#). The founding document of the platformist tradition is the 'Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists' - http://www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story_id=1000
8. [8](#). <http://struggle.ws/wsm/positions/tradeunions.html>
9. [9](#). For examples of this reform program see the 'Union Democracy' section of the WSM position paper; "We fight to change the role of the full-time officials (...) For direct elections to all committees, conference delegations and national officerships, subject to mandation and recall (...) Where revolutionaries can gain enough support to win election to national officerships in large unions, or indeed small ones, this support should not be used to merely elect a candidate. Instead it should be used to fundamentally change the structure of the union in such a way as to return power to the membership and turn the officers into administrators and resource people rather than decision makers."
10. [10](#). The Mass Strike, p15.
11. [11](#). Gilles Dauvé, A contribution to the critique of political autonomy - <http://libcom.org/library/a-contribution-critique-political-autonomy-gilles-dauve-2008>
12. [12](#). Gilles Dauvé, The eclipse and re-emergence of the communist movement - <http://libcom.org/library/eclipse-re-emergence-giles-dauve-0>
13. [13](#). For a far more comprehensive account see the Solidarity Federation pamphlet 'Anarcho-syndicalism in Puerto Real: from shipyard resistance to community control' - <http://libcom.org/library/anarcho-syndicalism-puerto-real-shipyard-resistance-community-control>
14. [14](#). Available in print from the Solidarity Federation or online [here](#).
15. [15](#). See [here](#).
16. [16](#). For a report on the establishment of the delegate council see here - <http://www.solfed.org.uk/solidarity/03.htm#04>
17. [17](#). See 'Workmates Victory' here - <http://www.solfed.org.uk/solidarity/04.htm#04>

18. [18.](http://libcom.org/news/metronet-climb-down-activist-victimisation-15102008) See - <http://libcom.org/news/metronet-climb-down-activist-victimisation-15102008>
19. [19.](http://libcom.org/library/a-contribution-critique-political-autonomy-gilles-dauve-2008) Gilles Dauvé, A contribution to the critique of political autonomy - <http://libcom.org/library/a-contribution-critique-political-autonomy-gilles-dauve-2008>
20. [20.](http://libcom.org/library/anarcho-syndicalism-puerto-real-shipyard-resistance-community-control) <http://libcom.org/library/anarcho-syndicalism-puerto-real-shipyard-resistance-community-control>
21. [21.](http://www.riff-raff.se/en/furtherreading/workmove.php) See <http://www.riff-raff.se/en/furtherreading/workmove.php>
22. [22.](http://libcom.org/library/cost-living-pay-increase-struggles-interview-2008) A several are described by a libertarian communist and UNISON convenor here: <http://libcom.org/library/cost-living-pay-increase-struggles-interview-2008>
23. [23.](http://libcom.org/library/pay-what-went-wrong-2007) See <http://libcom.org/library/pay-what-went-wrong-2007>
24. [24.](http://libcom.org/tags/mcdonalds-workers-resistance) See <http://libcom.org/tags/mcdonalds-workers-resistance>
25. [25.](#) See [here](#) and [here](#).
26. [26.](http://www.solfed.org.uk/booklets/the-economics-of-freedom.htm#09) <http://www.solfed.org.uk/booklets/the-economics-of-freedom.htm#09>
27. [27.](http://www.solfed.org.uk/constitution/#01b) <http://www.solfed.org.uk/constitution/#01b>
28. [28.](#) We are thinking specifically of the 2001 Brighton bin men's strike and occupation, where anarchists in conjunction with a wildcat occupation assisted by locking onto bin trucks to prevent scabs using them, while also helping flyer recruitment agencies that were recruiting scabs. See an account [here](#) - The [London Coalition Against Poverty](#) (LCAP) would also be an example of a group that engages in direct action both outside the workplace and beyond just propaganda.

The political organisation and the mass organisation

By Keir Snow, Liberty and Solidarity, published on July 30th, 2010

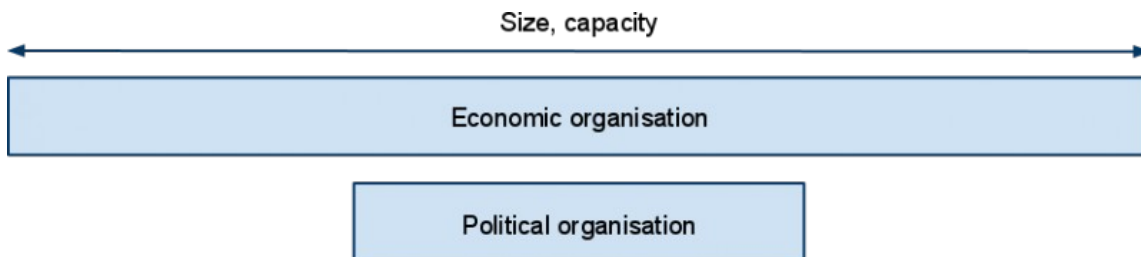
<http://www.libertyandsolidarity.org/node/99>

Whilst organising closely with politically like-minded comrades may seem like an obvious instinct, it is worth evaluating what role a political organisation can or should play. In this essay I will build a model of working class organisation, as a means of comparing the nature and functions of the political organisation and the mass organisation. Like all such models, this will be idealised, and more of a statement as to how things perhaps ought to be, than how they are at present.

How mass organisation should relate to political organisations is a key question for socialists as clearly permanent mass organisations are required to sustain and grow class consciousness, and to allow victories to be built upon and turned into further victories.

So what are the key attributes of a coherent political organisation? Tight theoretical and tactical unity are to be expected, with everyone being on the same page and pushing in the same direction. Because of this, the size of a political organisation is often greatly limited, as there are only so many people out there who believe in whichever specific brand of socialism the organisation defines itself as, and who simultaneously have a shared attitude towards the practical day to day tasks of activism.

In contrast to this is the mass economic organisation, which for most libertarians is the key to the revolution. This most obviously could be a trade union, however other organisations such as residents groups may also fall under this banner. As the name suggests, mass organisations are very large in size, but consequently lack a great deal of political coherency. Another important factor in analysing organisations is their capacity. A small political group will have little capacity, as this capacity is primarily derived from financial resources and man-hours, however, with collective discipline, its capacity can be increased somewhat. In contrast mass organisation have large capacity, generally having a lot of funding and human resource available to them, however whether or not this capacity is utilised, and in what direction, is another question.

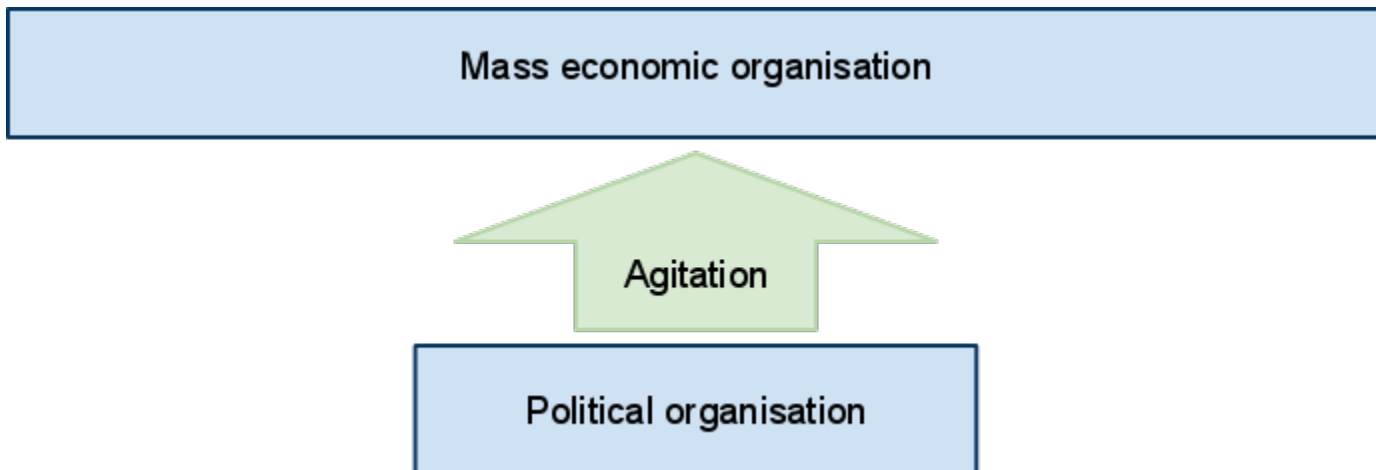


Some socialists, both in the libertarian and statist camps, believe that the mass organisation should be the political organisation, in other words, they are “partyists”. A good example of partyism from the statist side is the Scottish Socialist Party, who’s basic

strategy is growth. However, in the Libertarian camp we can also find similar ideas, the most obvious example being the IWA affiliated groups, each of which seeks to build hybrid political/economic mass organisations.

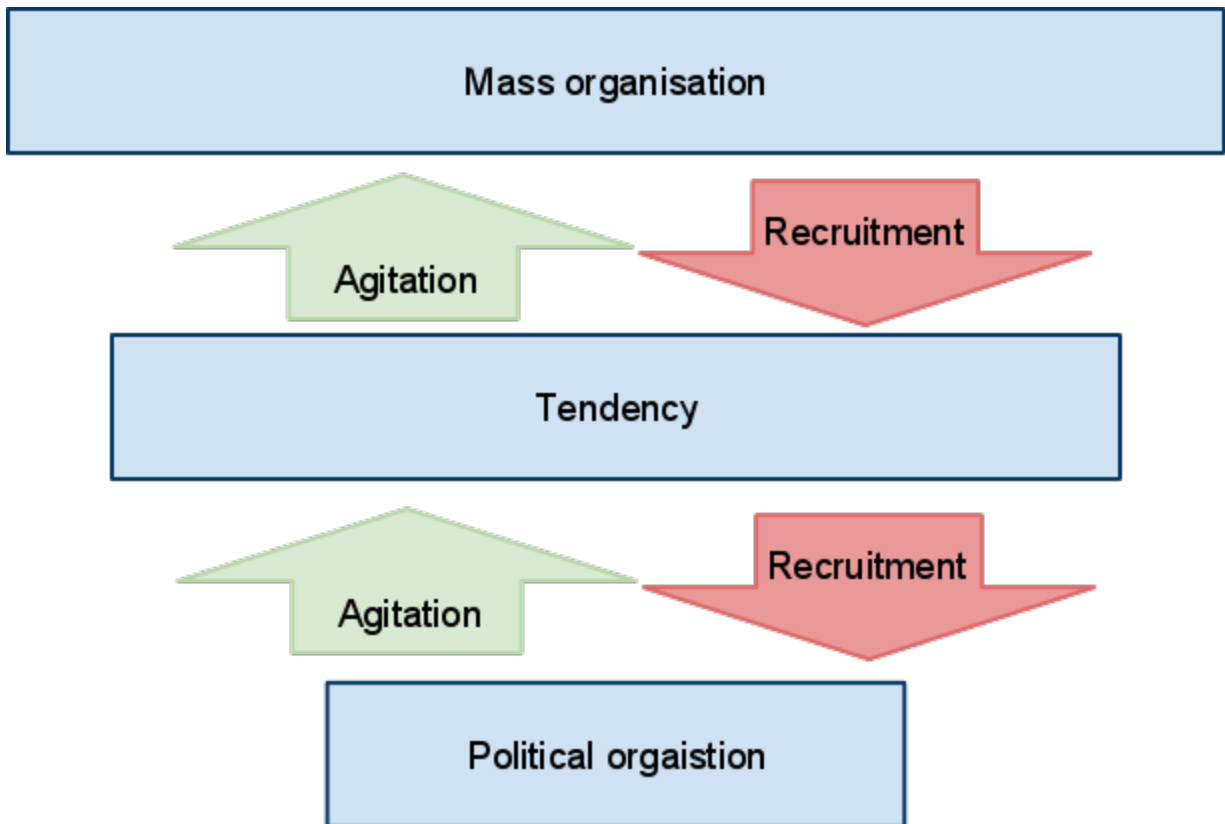
This approach however, can only succeed where either the revolutionary politics of the organisation are de-emphasised (such as in the case of the SSP), as most working class people in the UK at least are social democrats and thus unlikely to join a revolutionary organisation, or the political “mass” organisation remains small, such as in the case of IWA affiliates. It is worth noting at this point that I am observing general trends, and I am sure there are people in both the SSP and IWA who do not think their organisations should work this way.

A more sophisticated approach to mass organisations can be found in both statist and libertarian camps, where the political organisation participates and agitates within the wider mass organisation. This is the model adopted by most platform anarchist groups and also many trotskyst groups, at least when it comes to their industrial work. This model typically means the the political organisation will attempt to engage directly with the mass membership of the economic organisation in which they find themselves. This model allows the mass organisation to grow and play some role in developing the consciousness in the wider working class, through the implicit strengthening of the class that comes through organisation.



The flaw with this model however is that a small political group still has little capacity, and its constituency, now the membership of the mass organisation rather than the whole of the working class, is still very large and whilst closer to its politics, is still most likely to be social-democratic, therefore the influence of the political organisation is constrained.

Enter the tendency organisation. The tendency organisation sits in between the political organisation and the mass organisation, both in terms of size, capacity and political coherency. The tendency allows the political organisation to pursue a subset of its goals with like-minded allies, thus granting it larger capacity. The tendency also creates a smaller, though politically closer, constituency where the political organisation can hope to wield greater influence and has better prospects of recruitment.



A classic example of a tendency is the Industrial Syndicalist Education League, essentially a syndicalist faction within the wider UK labour movement from 1910-1914, though there are plenty of others. Sometimes, where appropriate tendencies do not exist, the political organisation may have to set them up from scratch, attempting to find allies throughout the broader mass organisation. Tendencies may also be multi-layered, with tendencies working within other tendencies to build or reform them.

This model of organisation quite naturally fits in to the ladder of engagement. Typically the political organisation will want to recruit experienced militants, and obviously those militants should be politically close to the organisation. Those individuals who start out joining the mass organisation, then a tendency, have already gone on a political and experiential journey, developing their skills and ideas and drawing closer to the political organisation. It is therefore within these tendencies that recruits are to be found.

In real life of course, things are never quite so simple, and most political organisations, rather than falling neatly into one of the above strategies, alternate between them, at times agitating at the whole of the working class, at times within mass organisations and sometimes in tendencies. For example, when it comes to propaganda, most socialist groups produce all their own materials, usually aimed at the general public, as ineffectual as that may be due to their limited capacity, instead of distributing propaganda for a mass organisation, which a member of the public is more likely to join, and consequently take their first step on the ladder of engagement.

The same is often true of community work, where rather than trying to build a mass organisation such as a residents group the political organisation will instead set up temporary campaigns, with the only permanent organisation being the political group itself.

Hopefully, the model outlined above can serve some use in understanding how political organisations interact with the working class. The left's current partyist trends away from mass organisation work in all but the industrial sphere, and the inadequate use of tendencies and other alliances have contributed greatly to the ineffectualness of the left. If we change our tactics to account for our limited capacity, I believe we can achieve far more, increasing our capacity many times.

Syndicalism and Rank-and-file Movements

Excerpt from **Black Flame**, Chapter 7: Dual Unionism, Reforms and Other Tactical Debates, Pgs. 231-233

A third syndicalist approach, which offers an alternative to both boring from within and dual unionism, is worth mentioning: the formation of independent rank-and-file movements within the established unions. This type of syndicalism can be anarcho-syndicalist, as was the case with the Union of Anarcho-syndicalist Propaganda and the Confederation of Russian Anarcho-syndicalists, or revolutionary syndicalist, as was the case with the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement in Britain, all active in the 1910s.

This approach does not seek to capture the union apparatus as such. This is where it differs from the boring within of groups like the ISEL and SLNA. It is an independent movement, it may overlap with the orthodox unions and participate in them, but it does not seek to capture them; instead, it aims at forming a movement of the union rank and file as well as the unorganised, based on regular mass meetings and delegate structures and infused with a radical programme that can operate independently of the unions where needed. The classic statement of this approach is as follows: "We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them."

A key example of this approach is the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement in Britain in the mid-1910s; we will examine the Russian case in the next chapter. An independent rank-and-file movement emerged spontaneously as a result of a range of factors, notably increasing wartime controls over industry, the dilution of skilled work, and the quiescence of the union bureaucracy. Revolutionary syndicalists soon dominated it politically. In Scotland, the stronghold of the SLP in Britain, De Leonists like Gallacher found themselves playing a leading role in the first major initiative: the important Clyde Workers Committee. Shifting away from their traditional dual unionism, they began to see a rank-and-file workers' movement, independent of the union leadership, yet overlapping with the unions, as the road to One Big Union. In England, IWW supporters won a number of workers' committees to the 1908 IWW Preamble from 1917 onward, and the centre of the movement shifted increasingly to Sheffield.

By 1919, the emerging movement was evolving into a formal countrywide structure, with a national administrative committee headed by J.T. Murphy, and published *Solidarity* and *The Worker*. The former had been established by syndicalists like Mann, and the latter was printed on the SLP press. The movement held national conferences in 1919 and 1920 (taking care not to develop into a new dual union), and linked up with the syndicalist South Wales Unofficial Reform Committee, which worked within the miners' union. It also formed close links with the Chicago IWW, including an arrangement for the interchange of membership cards.

For the syndicalists involved in the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement, the movement ought to become "one powerful organisation that will place the workers in complete control of the industry." When organised as a formal national body, it adopted as "its objective control of the workshop, control of the industry, the overthrow

of the present capitalist system of society and the establishment of Industrial Democracy." Yet, for all that, it did not aim to capture the existing unions or destroy them. J.T. Murphy (1888-1966) - the leading figure in the Sheffield Workers' Committee, a prominent De Leonist, and later a CPGB founder - was widely regarded as the theorist of the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement. He advocated replacing the "territorially constructed State" with a "real democracy" based on industrial unionism, and saw the committee as an important step on the road to a "Workers' Republic."

The Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement was open to other currents as well; it should not be confused with a syndicalist militant minority like the SLNA or ISEL. Thus, included numerous activists from the Independent Labour Party, a political socialist group, as well as the British Socialist Party, a Marxist party that emerged from the old Social Democratic Federation in opposition to that group's prowar position. MacLean, the Scottish Marxist, was another notable member. Still, the "chief source of the ideology of the shop stewards' movement were the French and American doctrines of revolutionary syndicalism and Industrial Unionism."

The rank-and-file syndicalist approach transcends, in key ways, both dual unionism and boring from within. On the one hand, it accepts the argument that dual unionism is likely to simply isolate militants in small separate unions and accepts the boring from within notion that even the conservative unions are basically working-class organisations. On the other hand, it also accepts the dual unionist claim that an established union bureaucracy is exceedingly difficult to overturn. The task, then, is not to capture the union as a whole but to build an independent workers' movement that overlaps with the unions and can itself undertake the role of the One Big Union.

Rank-and-file syndicalism converges in some respects with the workplace strategy of some contemporary anarchists. The WSM argues that unions are nonetheless fundamentally working-class organisations and a necessary response to the class system: "No amount of conservatism, bureaucracy or backwardness within the unions can obliterate this essential fact." It also objects to dual unionism (which it identifies as the hallmark of syndicalism), and sees work within the existing unions as making a major contribution to revolution. The unions are seen as internally contested, and shaped by ongoing struggles between the bureaucracy and the membership as well as competing ideas. What is needed is a rank-and-file opposition within the unions that is willing to defend the union while challenging the bureaucracy, and that is able to develop its own campaigns as well as support progressive union initiatives. The aim is neither to take over the union as a whole nor to withdraw from it; it is to promote a style of unionism that is "essentially the same" as syndicalism and can lay the basis for workers' councils: "Trade unions will not become revolutionary organisations, they were never set up to be that. However from within trade union struggle will arise the embryo of the workers' councils of the future. The early beginning of this are seen wherever workers create their own rank & file organisation (without mediation or "all-knowing" leaders) to pursue their class interests."

Anarchists can be elected to unpaid and accountable union posts, like shop steward positions, but should not get embroiled in the union bureaucracy. The promotion of direct action, self-activity, and revolutionary ideas is central to the revolutionary project, and anarchists should thus also oppose engagement with corporatist structures and other types of centralised bargaining that remove initiative from the shop floor. The

rank-and-file movement should not be the property of any single political current, yet it should be broad enough to attract workers who are militant but would not see themselves as having a particular political outlook; while "we fight for our politics" in the rank-and-file movement, "the movement should be independent of any one political organisation," and its role is really "to provide a focus for workers moving to the left and wanting to fight."

From mobilisation to 'massification'

<http://libcom.org/library/mobilisation-massification>

A text produced during the successful 8-day occupation at Sussex University in March 2010.

Preface

This short text was written by an occupier on the third day (Saturday 13 March 2010) of an 8-day occupation of Arts A2 building at Sussex University. It was borne out of frustration with the way a radical act – a mass contempt of court (an imprisonable offence) by hundreds of students and even some staff – so quickly returned to the safe leftist territory of listening to Party hacks (and at least one non-affiliated local militant) urging us to unite against the “fascist BNP”. But it was also urging against the safe anarchist territory of small group activism. The text is a call for both the popular frontism of the leftists and the substitutionist activism of many anarchists to be superseded by a process of ‘massification.’

In the end, this text was not published at the time. It was discussed amongst a group of anarchist/anarcho-syndicalist students and staff, and decided that publishing the text would potentially polarise the situation and thus prevent the emergence of the very strategy advocated in the text. This partly because many of the leftists were not die-hard party liners (some weren't even party members, while some joined during the occupation) but relatively independently minded and prepared to discuss strategy.

Instead, it was decided to argue the central points of the text in the mass assembly that evening. The argument was essentially against a proposal to hold rallies/marches every day; as one person put it “I don't care what you can call it as long as I can chant.” In opposition to this kind of empty sloganeering it was argued to focus on the content of our activity and specifically the space we held, which could be used to draw in those students and staff who opposed the cuts but who had been alienated by the activism of the Stop the Cuts campaign.

This argument was largely successful. Instead of focussing on endless rallies and marches, a program of teach-ins were arranged. While leftist big-shots like Alex Callinicos (SWP leader) spoke, the program was dominated by staff. Some teach-ins were quite academic, but the most inspiring provided a space for staff to make public their feelings about the cuts that they had thus far had to bear as a private burden. The catharsis was moving, and difficult to convey to those not present, but something changed in the character of the movement – or rather it ceased to be activism and became something like a movement.

Parallel to the teach-ins it was decided to organise an Emergency General Meeting of the Students Union to pass a vote of no confidence in university management (the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group, VCEG). The main demand of the occupation was the reinstatement of the ‘Sussex Six’, suspended after an occupation the previous week

where management fabricated a hostage situation in order to call in riot police with dogs. Several students were assaulted and two arrested, while six occupiers were suspended.

The idea was alongside the direct action of the occupation, the ‘proper channels’ of the EGM provided an additional pressure on management. The EGM needed 600 students to be quorate. For context, the previous AGM had failed to reach quoracy, getting only 400 students. At just 48 hours notice, the EGM drew in 850 students with around a hundred more turned away with Mandella Hall already over capacity. The motion was passed near-unanimously.

This seemed to reaffirm an assertion of the text below – that support was there, but alienated from the activism of the campaign. Together with the occupation, through which hundreds passed in its 8 days, this seemed to be the beginnings of the ‘massification’ called for. The day after the EGM, on the morning of the one-day UCU strike (Thursday 18 March 2010), the Six had still not been reinstated. Occupiers marched out at 7am to join the picket lines, unsure of what seemed an ambiguous outcome.

Then the news filtered through – management had caved in and unconditionally reinstated the Six. Victory! But also, an end. The following day was the end of term, the massification that had begun was to be sharply curtailed and the nascent movement put on hold. Now then seems the time to publish this text, so that at Sussex and beyond we can critically reflect on what happened in those 8 days where so much seemed to change, only to suddenly return to normal.

From mobilisation to massification

As students, workers – occupiers - to be part of a mass contempt of court, occupying Arts A2 in defiance of both university bosses and the British state has been an inspiring experience. But there is an elephant in the room. A clear majority of students seem to support the aims of the Stop the Cuts campaign, plus the majority of staff. But our biggest demos number in the region of 500, and staff, especially lower paid, more precarious support staff are conspicuous by their absence.

There have been some steps taken to address this; a cleaner spoke to the occupation on Friday morning, and teach-ins have been arranged to try and attract more students. There are obvious reasons that staff threatened with job losses may wish to keep a low profile. But there remains some truth to VCEG’s accusation that the occupation ‘claims to represent’ the student body. As long as the student body is represented by a minority and not active for itself en masse, the campaign is largely limited to symbolic action, and management can attempt to weather the storm.

So how then to grow the campaign? There are two answers to this question. The easy answer we all know, the other one needs to be collectively answered through debate and critical reflection on our successes and failings so far. The first answer sees the problem as one of mobilisation. Students are supportive, but not active. The task therefore is to

door-knock and flyer, demonstrate and sloganeer, building one demonstration after the next of increasing size, turning passive support into active support.

The problem is, we've been doing this and it seems to have reached its limits. Mobilisation certainly has its place in the campaign, but the demonstrations long ago hit a plateau and numbers even began to decline. It was VCEG's repression with police and arbitrary suspensions which gave us back our momentum, swelling our numbers and allowing us to take Arts A2. So what is the alternative to the 'mobilisation' answer?

First, we need to look at its assumptions. Fundamentally, the mobilisation approach is based on the idea that what we are doing is correct and we simply need more people doing it. The problem is posed as *quantitative*. Often this assumption is correct, and thus mobilisation can be successful. For instance when picket lines form, getting as many workers and students mobilised to support and respect them is vital. However mobilisation can become an end in itself, leading to ritualised activity: what we want to suggest is that the quantitative problem of numbers may reflect a *qualitative* problem of the character of our activity.

To understand this, we need to look at two concepts of unity; political and practical. Both have been present in the occupation, but both pull in opposite directions. Practical unity is what we showed when we sprinted in our hundreds to Bramber House, only to reassess and move en masse to occupy Arts A2. Practical unity is based on common interests – we all recognise that the victimisation of the Sussex 6 is illegitimate (even if technically lawful), and we all recognise that the cuts are an attack on us all. These views are widely held by students beyond those present on the day.

This practical unity stands in opposition to political unity. Political unity is based on perceived lowest common denominators and the logic of 'coalition building', putting aside or ignoring political differences in order to create a popular front. The problem here is twofold; firstly the emphasis on unity can act as a block on critical discussion and self-reflection of tactics and strategy, secondly it can take us into the comfort zone of leftist shibboleths that we imagine to be popular but in fact are simply populist.

For example, three speakers in a row yesterday denounced the "fascist BNP". It is not important to discuss here whether the BNP are fascists, what is important is that they occupy the symbolic role of an evil that we can all unite against. The problem is this kind of political unity is both shallow and devoid of class content – Michael Farthing and Lord Mandleson would oppose the BNP too.

Having encouraged Uni staff to risk their jobs by joining the occupation – some were even contemplating staying the night – they were yesterday confronted by something more resembling a political rally. For seasoned leftists/activists this is unremarkable or even unnoticed. For many of those outside this ghetto it was a profoundly alienating experience.

Mobilisation is a one-way process that want to make others more like us. If students don't agree with us they should. If they do, they should get active, join us in demonstrating and chanting slogans. This certainly has its place in the campaign. But when mobilisation is posed as the answer per se it requires a popular front/political unity, supressing critical reflection and in turn leading to ritualised activity undertaken regardless of its tactical or strategic merits. It's easy to mistake criticism and debate for disunity if the unity sought is political.

Beyond the one-way logic of mobilisation, we want to propose a two-way logic of massification. The unity we seek is a practical one; political disunity must be recognised, nay encouraged, thus contributing to an ongoing culture of critical debate. Massification means not simply mobilising greater numbers of passive supporters, but also reflecting on what it is in our own activity which has thus far separated us off from that passive support as an activist minority.

It means not just chanting, but listening. Talking to staff and students and engaging in two-way dialogue – seeking a unity based on *common (i.e. class) interests* not common politics. There have been attempts at this, some students have been talking to cleaners, porters, security and a representative of the cleaners spoke at the occupation yesterday morning. There have also been attempts to engage with student criticisms through the Q&A.

Many of those who would feel singled out by the criticisms of mobilisationism can take credit for some of these activities. This is not a criticism of individuals or groups but of strategy. If we are to not just win the reinstatement of the six but stop the cuts we need mass activity. But rather than viewing this as just a problem of mobilisation – getting people to act more like us – we need to see it as a problem of massification – drawing in more people whilst also rejecting our own separation from other students and workers in this role of 'activists' which we have found ourselves occupying.

“So why do we behave like activists? Simply because it's the easy cowards' option? It is easy to fall into playing the activist role because it fits into this society and doesn't challenge it - activism is an accepted form of dissent. Even if as activists we are doing things which are not accepted and are illegal, the form of activism itself - the way it is like a job - means that it fits in with our psychology and our upbringing. It has a certain attraction precisely because it is not revolutionary.”

- Give Up Activism