



**Insurrection
v.
Organization**

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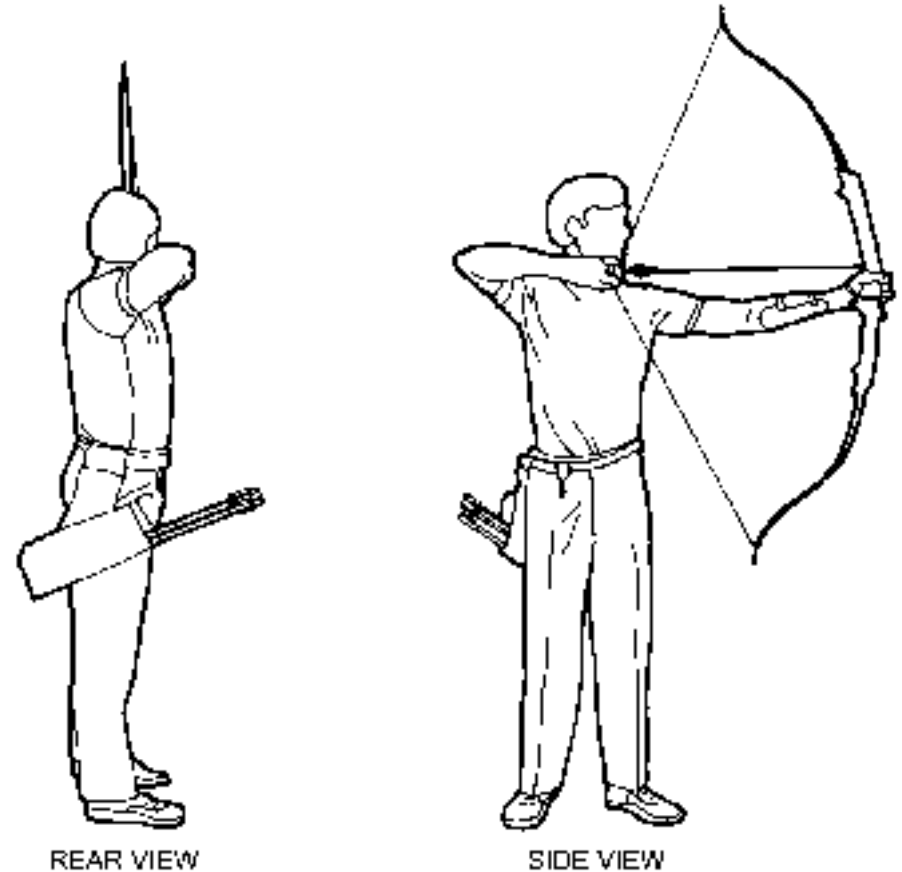
Editor's Note:

This portion of a wonderful essay by Peter Gelderloos is reprinted here in hopes that the Anarchist community can truly gain some wisdom from Peter's words. There is much to be said for a multi-pronged approach to social change. And as some Anarchists in Amerikkka and around the world have seen in the past, the effectiveness of diversifying tactics can be a great way for people with different ideas and abilities to all help contribute to the gargantuan task of dismantling the government and other institutional hierarchies.

What really resonates with me in this article is the concept that none of us should be reduced to our ideas, either by ourselves, or our peers.

It seems evident that a schism between Insurrectionists and Organizationalists is counter-productive. Let's all be insurrectionary and organizational!

The last half of the essay has been omitted, not in an effort of censorship, but in that the real meat of this essay seemed to be the first half. The rest of the article is available on Infoshop.org for anyone interested in reading the essay's critiques discussed in the second half.



their skin color may have given them, and identify primarily as workers, with nothing but fictive barriers standing between them and the white anarchists sitting in their union halls waiting for a little diversity to wander in. The minimization of race can also mask itself behind a misuse of the recognition that race is an invention without physiological justification. I've heard many anarchists take this further to say that race does not exist. I imagine this could come as a slap in the face to a great many of the world's people, it certainly contradicts my own lived experiences, and it is also a supremely idiotic statement. By definition something that does not exist cannot cause results in the real world. I think most anarchists who make this statement would be horrified by someone who denied the existence of racism, but they must be using another kind of denial, that which accompanies abusive relations, to not see this is exactly what they have just done. (Other anarchists take a more dishonest but unassailable route by simple denouncing as 'identity politics' any excessive preoccupation with race). Race is a harmful categorization that must be abolished, and like capitalism or the state it cannot be wished away or solved by exclusion from one's analysis any more than AIDS or the scars of a beating can be wished away. The liberal 'color blind' mentality to which so many anarchists adhere can only be a way of prolonging white supremacy.

Until white anarchists of all stripes allow (no, encourage) anarchism to adapt to non-white stories, anarchism is likely to remain about as relevant to most people of color as voting is to immigrants. And as long as anarchists continue to view differences in the same way the state and civilization we oppose has taught us to, we will never encompass the breadth of perspective and participation we need to win.



"I consider it terrible that our movement, everywhere, is degenerating into a swamp of petty personal quarrels, accusations, and recriminations. There is too much of this rotten thing going on, particularly in the last couple of years."

--out of a letter from Alexander Berkman to Senya Fleshin and Mollie Steimer, in 1928. Emma Goldman adds the postscript: "Dear children. I agree entirely with Sasha. I am sick at heart over the poison of insinuations, charges, accusations in our ranks. If that will not stop there is no hope for a revival of our movement."



Fortunately, most anarchists in the US avoid any ideological orthodoxy and shun sectarian divides. Unfortunately, most of us also seem to avoid serious strategizing. Those who do take this on tend more towards one or another orthodoxy, and reading the pages of the country's anarchist journals an outsider would get the impression that the movement here is indeed sectarian. In fact there are many controversies, and no clear tectonic splits, but one divide that is growing more sharp is the same one that runs through much of Europe, the debate between insurrection and organization. The former overlap with post-Leftist anarchists, the latter are often anarchist-communists. Here in Greece, where I've spent the past couple weeks, the divide is very strong between insurrectionary anarchists associated with the Black Bloc, and the heavily organized Antiauthoritarian Movement (AK, in Greek).

In this and most other controversies I see anarchists becoming embroiled in, there seems to be a lingering affinity for certain Western values that are at the heart of the state and capitalism: a worldview based on dichotomies, and a logical structure that is startlingly monotheistic. For example, when there are two different strategies for revolution, many of us do not see this as two paths for different groups of people to walk, taking their own while also trying to

understand the path of the Other, but as evidence that somebody must be Wrong (and it is almost certainly the Other).

Those of us who were raised with white privilege were trained to be very bad listeners, and it's a damn shame that we still haven't absorbed the emphasis on pluralism taught by the Magonistas and indigenous anarchists. I would love to blame our current disputes on the internet, because clearly it's so easy to be an asshole to somebody and sabotage any healthy, two-way conversation of differences if you've already abstracted them to words on a glowing screen, but schisms are much older than telecommunications (though no doubt our heavy reliance on the internet makes it more likely that disagreements will turn into counterproductive squabbles).

Call me naive but I think that a large part of the infighting can be chalked up to bad communication and a fundamentally monotheistic worldview more than to the actual substance of the differing strategies. No doubt, the substance is important. There are for example some necessary critiques of how the Left manages rebellion that have been circulated by (I hesitate to use easy labels but for convenience sake I'll call them:) insurrectionary anarchists, but even if certain people have figured out all the right answers nothing will stop them from going the way of the first anarchist movement if we don't all learn better ways of communicating, and understanding, our differences.

In Greece, the schism between insurrectionists and the Antiauthoritarian Movement has even led to physical fighting. There are people on both sides who have done fucked up things. The Black Bloc threw some molotovs at police in the middle of a melee, burning some of the protestors. People with AK bullied and beat up anarchists whom they suspected of stealing some computers from the university during an event AK organized, getting them in trouble. In response, some insurrectionists burned down the Antiauthoritarian Movement's offices in Thessaloniki. If we generalize, the stereotypes quickly step in to assure us that the other side is the enemy: "those disorganized insurrectionists are even throwing molotovs at other protestors!" or "those organizationalists are acting like the police of the movement." In each case, we can quickly see a preconstructed image of the lazy, chaotic insurrectionist, or the practically Marxist authoritarian so-called anarchist, and what we're doing is abstracting the

Protestant work ethic more strongly than most others. But we should take this as a challenge and get on with it.

The inability to work well with others is also the manifestation of another Western value that contradicts anarchism more blatantly than monotheism, and it is the Risk board mentality, that ingrained view of the world from above, with ourselves positioned as the architect or general. It is the understanding that you change society by forcing people to organize themselves in a certain way. The more classical anarchists put themselves at one extreme, thus occasioning many of the criticisms that they are authoritarian or Marxist, by pushing a program or insisting that revolution only occurs when people see the world through the narrow lens of class consciousness. The insurrectionists have caught a whiff of this and they go to the other extreme by forswearing activism and to a large extent avoiding contact with people who are much different from them. That way they don't have to worry about forcing their views on anyone. It should be apparent that both of these approaches rest on the assumption that contact between people who are different must result in a missionary relationship, with one converting the other. The idea of mutual influence, of organizing as building relationships with people rather than organizing as recruiting people, is generally absent.

In my view, the largest problem shared by both the insurrectionary and organizational camp, and most other anarchists, is whiteness: and even more than the failure of white anarchists to solve the mystifying problem of checking our white privilege, I mean intentionally preserving a movement narrative that tells the stories and contains the values of white people, and refusing to recognize the importance of white supremacy as a system of oppression every bit as important as the state, capitalism, or patriarchy.

Different white anarchists find different ways of minimizing race, depending on their analysis. But a common thread seems to be that perennial colonial belief that for salvation or hell, just for us to get along, the Other must become like me. On the one hand, this could be the insistence that white supremacy is nothing but a tool and invention of capitalism, perfectly explainable in economic terms, and that for people of color to liberate themselves, they must surrender whatever particular experience and history the world's ever present reaction to

tactics were not the major force in creating the necessary foundation. The CNT and the French students' union were both instrumental in building the revolution (the former by spreading anarchist ideas, launching strikes and insurrections, building connections of solidarity, preparing workers to take over the economy, and defeating the fascist coup in much of Spain; the latter by disseminating radical critiques (at least by certain branches), organizing the student strike and occupation, and organizing assemblies for collective decision making). The failing was when they did not recognize that their usefulness had passed, that as vital as they were those organizations were not the revolution. (This is not at all to say there should be a preparatory period, during which insurrectionary tactics are premature. Clandestine attacks at any stage can help build a fierce movement. Waiting to attack until the movement is large leaves you with a large, weak movement, with no experience in the tactics that will be necessary to grow or even survive the mounting repression. It might even leave you with a large, pacifist movement, which would just be awful.)

Between living in a squat or living in an apartment and organizing a tenants' association, there are inevitably going to be people who strongly prefer one or the other, whether or not we bring theory into the picture. This should be a good thing, because both of these actions can help bring about an anarchist world. When anarchists give up our narrow dogmatism and embrace the complexity that exists in any revolutionary process, we will closer.

Because I guess I'm not really happy with a happy ending, I'll conclude by pointing out some problems that I think are common to both tendencies. I've already mentioned the monotheistic mentality that leads to schisms within the movement, but especially in the US this exists on a larger scale as an inability of most anarchists to work in a healthy way with those outside the movement. This has been a failure to figure out what makes other Americans tick, what they are passionate about, what sphere of their lives is illegal, under what circumstances they will rebel, and how to engage them on this. There is no simple answer, and the complex answers will differ between regions, communities, and individuals, but I think most anarchists of all stripes have struck to self-referential and repetitive actions rather than plunging into this tedious work. Granted, people in the US aren't the easiest population for anarchists to engage; our culture encourages conformity, isolation, and the

actual people involved.

I don't want to suggest that certain or all of these groups don't have serious flaws they need to work on. I don't even believe both sides are equally to blame. In fact I tend to get into pretty nasty throw-downs myself with people who prefer some bullshit, hippy 'I'm okay, you're okay, everyone's okay' form of conflict resolution that avoids criticism in favour of an appearance of peace. But in Thessaloniki and Athena I met people from both sides, and most of them were very nice, people whom I would love to have as neighbors after we smashed the state together. Some of them badmouthed the other group, some of them were really trying to make peace, also talking critically to members of their own group who had wronged someone from the other side. On the whole, though, they are a minority, and the divide grows. Posters for a presentation I was giving in Athena got ripped down because the social center hosting me was associated with AK (though the people actually organizing the event and putting me up were not members, and tried to stay in the middle). The squat I stayed at in Thessaloniki was occupied by people aligned with the insurrectionists, and several of them told me not to mix with the AK people in Athena.

I might classify those problems as peculiar to Greece if I had not seen similar divides in Germany and Bulgaria, heard invective from the same kind of infighting in France spill over into the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair, and read plenty of these arguments in the anarchist press of the UK and US. Since the US is where I'm from and where I'll return, I will focus on the schism as it appears there. Because most US anarchists seem to focus on their day to day activities, I think many have not taken sides in this schism, are not even aware of it. So to a certain extent it exists as a theoretical disagreement, without yet the improbable weight of strident personalities thrown into the fray (well, some people from Anarchy magazine or NEFAC might say otherwise), fixing intransigent frontlines by virtue of the fact that an ideology personified is all the more stubborn. So we have a greater opportunity, for now, to deal with the problem theoretically.

As a sort of appendix, I've included critiques of four essays from the two sides of the debate, but first I will generalize what I see as the strengths and weaknesses of each. Insurrectionists make a number of vital contributions,

perhaps the most important being that the time is now, that the distinction between building alternatives and attacking capitalism is a false one. The critique of leftist bureaucracy as a recuperating force, the state within the movement that constantly brings rebellion back into the fold and preserves capitalism, is also right-on, though often the word 'organization' is used instead of bureaucracy, which can confuse things because to many people even an affinity group is also a type of organization. Or it can lead to a certain fundamentalism, as some people do intend to excommunicate all formal organizations, even if they are understood by the participants as a temporary tool and not a 'one big union.'

The insurrectionists also nurture a number of weaknesses. Their frequent criticisms of "activism" tend to be superficial and vague, reflecting more an inability to come to terms with their personal failures (or observed failures) in other modes of action, than any improved theoretical understanding, practically guaranteeing that the faults they encountered in activism will be replicated or simply inverted in whatever they end up doing as insurrectionists. (This point will be developed more in the appendix). There is also a certain lack of clarity in insurrectionist suggestions for action. Insurrectionists tend to do a good job in making a point of learning from people who are not anarchists, drawing on recent struggles in Mexico, Argentina, Algeria, and so on. However this also allows them to blur the difference between what is insurrectionary and what is insurrectionist. Much as most of them forswear ideology, by mining historical examples of insurrection to extract and distill a common theory and prescription for action, they earn that 'ist' and distinguish what is insurrectionary from what is insurrectionist. They have perceptively grasped that what is insurrectionary in a social struggle is often the most effective, most honest, and most anarchist element of the struggle; but by seeing through an insurrectionist lens they discount or ignore all the other elements of the struggle to which the insurrectionary is tied, even, in many cases, on which it is based. In this instance the 'ist' carries with it that monotheistic insistence that any elements reducible to another 'ism' must be incorrect. So we are told to open our eyes when the people in Oaxaca burn buses and defend autonomous spaces, but close our eyes when the strikes carried out by the teachers' union give birth in large part to the insurrection, when the rebels choose to organize themselves formally or above ground for a certain purpose.

the ones getting the heat from the authorities. A strictly insurrectionary approach will isolate the anarchists from the student movement, who will increasingly view them as parasites who only come to fight with the cops. Without the involvement of an anarchist perspective, nothing will stop the political parties from controlling the movement. And anarchists are unlikely to gain much respect in the student movement if they disdain working for the short-term goal of defeating this education law. Putting aside the dogma about reformism, everyone should be able to see the tragic tactical loss anarchists would suffer if the universities had their asylum privilege revoked (right now, people can attack a group of cops and then run back into the university and be safe), and of course a fierce movement using direct action is much more likely to dissuade the government from putting this education reform into effect than a passive movement dominated by party politics.

By fighting the police, taking over the streets, and squatting the universities, anarchists can inspire people, ignite passions, capture the national attention and raise the fear, which everyone immediately smells and is intoxicated by, that things can change. By spreading anarchist ideas, turning the universities into free schools, setting up occupation committees, organizing strikes, and preventing the domination of the student assemblies by the political parties, other anarchists can provide a bridge for more people to be involved, make overtures for solidarity to other sectors of society, and strengthen the movement that has provided a basis for the possibility of change. If these two types of anarchists work together, the insurrectionary ones are less likely to be disowned as outsiders and isolated, thrown to the police, because they have allies in the very middle of the movement. And when the state approaches the organized anarchists in the movement in an attempt to negotiate, they are less likely to give in because they have friends outside the organization holding them accountable and reminding them that power is in the streets.

Similar lessons on the potential compatibility of these two approaches can be drawn from anarchist history in Spain of '36 or France of '68. Both of these episodes ultimately showed that insurrection is a higher form of struggle, that waiting for the right moment is reactionary, that bureaucratic organizations such as the CNT or the French students' union end up collaborating with power and recuperating the movement. But what is easier to miss is that insurrectionary

approach. But also important to the rebellious makeup of Exarchia are the language classes for immigrants organized by social centers, the friendly relationships with neighbors (something the Black Bloc types don't always excel at cultivating) and even, curiously, some anarchist-owned businesses. In the US, the phrase 'anarchist business' would be scoffed at contemptuously, though one would also avoid applying it to anarchist bookstores, which are recognized as legitimate. But in Exarchia (and this was also the case in Berlin and Hamburg) the anarchist movement was bolstered by a number of anarchist-owned establishments, particularly bars. I think the rationale is fairly solid. If some anarchists need to get jobs in the meantime, and this is certainly more the case in the US than in most of Europe, it can be better to own your own bar that you open as a resource to the movement than to work at a Starbucks. Likewise, if anarchists are going to gather at a bar every Friday night (and this could also apply to movie theaters and a number of other things), why not go to one that supports a friend, and supports the movement (as an event space and even a source of donations)? It can also provide experience building collectives, and edge out the local bourgeoisie who would otherwise be a reactionary force in a semi-autonomous neighbourhood. I sure as hell ain't advocating 'buying out the capitalists' as a revolutionary strategy, but in Exarchia and elsewhere anarchist businesses, in this strictly limited sense, have played a role in creating a stronger movement.

Most important, if we want to consider the strength of Greek anarchists, has been the student movement. For a year, university students (along with professors and even many high school students) have been on strike, protesting a neoliberal education reform that would corporatize universities, privatize some of them, and end the official tradition of asylum that forbids police to set foot on Greek campuses. At the most superficial level, this student movement has allowed the anarchists many more opportunities to fight with the police. Getting a little deeper, it is perhaps the social conflict in Greece with the most potential to lead to an insurrectionary situation, similar in some regards to Paris in 1968. A strictly organizational strategy, whether of the typical syndicalist or anarchist-communist varieties, will be too weak, and too tame. Another organization will just be a competitor with the communist parties, and will have a conservative effect on the passions of the students, who show the tendency to blow up and act out quite ahead of the plans and predictions of the organizations, which are

Insurrectionists call for action inside or outside social movements, which I agree with. People should fight for themselves, for their own reasons and own lives, even if they have to fight alone. This is, after all, how many social movements exist at the beginning, before they are recognized as social movements. To contradict a criticism I have seen from some more organizationally minded anarchists, it is not at all vanguardist to take action first or even attempt to escalate actions, because fighting for your own reasons or attempting to inspire other people to action by example is quite the opposite of vanguardism. In fact a common sign of a vanguardist is one who objects to other people running ahead of the flock (and consequently ahead of the flock's vanguard). However this insurrectionist stance is sometimes accompanied by a disparaging view of social movements, as though any movement is inherently authoritarian, inherently bureaucratic, inherently recuperative (in Green Anarchy I even read one fairly silly call for 'momentum' instead of movements, though if the author of this piece was doing anything besides redefining 'movement' as 'the bad sort of movement' and defining everything else as 'momentum' it wasn't very clear, because of that preference for words instead of meanings fashionable among many (anti)political writers). But we should not underestimate the importance of social movements. I recently had the opportunity to spend five months among anarchists in the former Soviet bloc, primarily in Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria. Unanimously, the anarchists I met told me that the socialist dictatorships had destroyed and subsequently prevented any social movements, and left a legacy of people who hate and distrust the government (many of them are also dissatisfied with capitalism) but who also have no tradition or inclination to trust and participate in social movements, or even cooperate with their neighbors. The anarchist situation there is far bleaker than it is in the US: the anarchists are alone, isolated, without any clear starting point for action, much less insurrection. One Romanian anarchist said organizing in his home country was like going to a foreign country where you don't speak the language and trying to build anarchy. (In Poland and Czechia, the anarchist movement is much stronger, and these are also the countries that developed dissident social movements in the '80s. Incidentally the dictatorship in Romania was toppled not by a movement but by an insurrection that was largely stage-managed (these too can be recuperated). In light of this, it seems a glaring absence that insurrectionists tend to avoid actions or analysis focused on building up social movement (if by movement we only mean a large informal network or population, that may

include formal organizations, and that constitutes itself as a social force in response to perceived problems, initially acting outside the scope of previously routinized and institutionalized forms of social activity).

Insurrectionist suggestions for action tend to revolve around creating autonomous spaces that support us, allow us to practice communal, anarchist living now, and serve as a base for waging war against the state. This is as good as any other singular anarchist strategy, in fact it's a good deal better than a few, but also like the other strategies in circulation it has already been defeated by the state. Insurrectionists in the US don't even need to use that typical American excuse of amnesia; in this case, isolationism is to blame. The largely anarchist squatters' movement that thrived across Western Europe in the '70s and '80s (and shadows of which still survive), including the German Autonomen, already attempted (in a very serious way) the same strategy that US insurrectionists are now circulating without any differences serious enough to be considered a revision or lesson from past failures. And they are likely, if they ever get a half of the momentum the Europeans had, which under present circumstances is improbable, to end up exactly the same way: an isolated, drug-addicted wasteland of ghettoized subculture frozen in a self-parodying gesture of defiance (yes, this is a pessimistic view, and one that discounts the several wonderful squats and social centers that are still hanging on, but I think insurrectionists would agree there's no point in looking for the bright side of a movement that has come to accommodate capitalism). It goes something like this: the state and the culture industry isolate them (operating almost like Daoist martial artists, pushing them in the direction they're already going, only harder than they intended), by many accounts flood in addictive drugs, which come to fill a new need as the stress mounts from the prolonged state of siege brought about by frequent attacks from police; not everyone can live under those conditions, especially older folks and those with children drop out or turn to more escapist, less combative forms. The militants stay within their circle of barricades for so long that in-crowd aesthetics and mentalities entrench, they are, after all, at war with the rest of the world by now. Eventually the rebels lose any real connections with the outside world, and any possibility to spread the struggle. Thus weakened and lacking external solidarity, half the squats are evicted, one by one, and the others become exhausted and give up the fight.

Insurrectionists can be helped by the movement-building and social resources of the organizationalists, who in turn can be helped by the more radical perspective and sometimes stronger tactics, the dreams put into practice, of the insurrectionists.

Because the US anarchist movement often looks to Greece for inspiration, especially the insurrectionists, I find it interesting that the Greek experience seems to show the two approaches to be complementary, even if the organizations involved are bitter enemies. In the States we usually hear about the Greeks when they attack a police station or burn surveillance cameras; basically every week. But we do not hear about the foundation that makes this possible. For starters Greece enjoys a more anarchic culture. Family ties are stronger than state loyalties (Greek anarchists were shocked to learn that a number of prisoners in the US were turned in by relatives), there is widespread distrust of authority, and many people still remember the military dictatorship and understand the potential necessity of fighting with cops. US culture is not nearly so supportive of our efforts, so we need to figure out how to influence the broader culture so it will be more fertile for anarchy.

The state has been doing the opposite for centuries. I couldn't tell how much the anarchists in Greece influenced the surrounding culture and how much they just took advantage of it, but there were many clearly conscious attempts to influence the social situation. A great deal of activism goes into opposing the European Union immigration regime, working with and supporting immigrants, and the squatted social centers play a role in this. Such work also helps make the anarchist movement more diverse. Labor organizing plays a role in Greece, though I learned much less about this while I was there. In Athena the foundation that keeps much of the local anarchist movement alive and kicking is a neighbourhood, Exarchia. This entire quarter, located in the center of the capital, has the feel of a semi-autonomous zone. You can spraypaint on the walls in broad daylight with little risk (wheatpasting is even safer), you see more anarchist propaganda than commercial advertising, and you rarely encounter cops. In fact you're likely to find nervous squads of riot police standing guard along the neighbourhood's borders (nervous because it's not uncommon for them to be attacked). The autonomous spaces, the destruction of surveillance cameras, the Molotov attacks on cops are all characteristic of the insurrectionary

Hopefully by now it is clear how these two tendencies can cooperate for greater effect. First of all, by abandoning that horrible pretension that just because the Other disagrees with our point of view, they have nothing valid to offer. It follows from this that we recognize different people will prefer to be active in different ways, and in fact different temperaments draw people towards different anarchist tendencies before theory ever comes into it. Some people will never want to go to your boring meetings or organize in their workplace (they won't even want to have a workplace). Some people will never want to set foot in your nasty-assed squat or live in fear that the state will take away their kids because of the lifestyle of the parents (or they won't even want to subject their kids to the stress of a life of constant warfare). And guess what? That's fine and natural. If we can cover each other's backs. Above ground organizers who build support for the insurrectionists, who stand by those masked terrorists instead of denouncing them, will create a stronger movement. Insurrectionists who carry out the waves of sabotage the organizers are too exposed to call for, who keep in touch with the outside world and also keep the organizers honest and aware of the broader picture, the horizon of possibility, will create a stronger movement. Organizationalists who exclude the insurrectionists help them isolate themselves. Insurrectionists who see the organizers as the enemy help them recuperate the struggle. These are self-fulfilling prophecies.



Because of their proximity to that history, a particular group of French anarchists could not just ignore the weaknesses of the strategy. This group, the authors of Appel (Call), the most intelligent and insightful insurrectionist (if I can give it a label it has not claimed for itself) tract I have come across, hit the nail on the head when, advancing a more developed and lively form of this strategy, they pointed out that the squatters' movement died because it stopped strategizing (and thus stopped growing and changing, stagnated). However, more than one nail is needed to hold the strategy together. Stagnation was the likely outcome of the squatters' movement due to its very structure, and the consequent structure of state repression. The falling off of strategizing was a probable result of the strategy itself.

And what about the organizationalists' First I should note that this is a rather amorphous group, and few people actually identify themselves as organizationalists. A good part of them are the old or classical anarchists: anarchist-communists whose strategy rests in part on creating a strong federation of anarchists, or syndicalists building anarchist labor unions, or otherwise working in the labor movement. Some in this camp are social anarchists who prefer an involvement in mainstream society to waging anything that resembles war (class or insurrectionary). More than a few are anarchist activists working above ground with some organization around a particular issue, perhaps without a clear long-term strategy, who have been swept in with the others by insurrectionist criticisms. I will focus on the classical anarchists, because they have more clearly articulated strategies (this is not at all to criticize the others, after all no strategy can be better than a simplistic, dogmatic one). Hopefully the criticisms I make there will be informative for all anarchists who consider the use of formal organizations.

On the one hand, the emphasis of these anarchists on building social movements and being accessible to outsiders is well placed. Clearly a major problem of US anarchists is isolation, and organizing in above-ground groups around problems that are apparent to broader populations can help overcome this isolation. It is extremely helpful when there are types of anarchist action people can get involved in that are relatively easy, that don't require a plunge straight from mainstream life into uncompromising war against the system (to go off on a tangent, insurrectionists often praise the replicability of certain

actions, but I wonder how many started off as activism-oriented anarchists and how many were insurrectionists from the beginning. In other words, how replicable is insurrectionist anarchism for most people?)

The communication and coordination that, say, a federation can provide can be helpful in certain instances. In Europe many of the prisoner support organizations that anarchists of all kinds rely on are organized as federations. Organizations can also build and escalate the struggle. For example, the actions of an anarchist labor union can make anarchism accessible to more people, by providing an immediately apprehendable way to get involved, a forum for spreading ideas, and a demonstration of the sincerity and practicality of anarchists winning improvements in the short-term. I would also wager that people who have gotten some practice in a union, and learned first-hand about strikes for example, are more likely to launch a wildcat strike than people who have never been part of a union.

An approach that relies heavily on formal organizations also has a number of weaknesses. Since these weaknesses have appeared and reappeared in no uncertain terms for over a century, it's a damn shame to have to repeat them, but unfortunately there seems to be the need. Democratic organizations with any form of representation can quickly become bureaucratic and authoritarian. Direct democratic organizations still run the risk of being dominated by political animals (as Bob Black pointed out in more detail in *Anarchy After Leftism*). And there is something problematic in the first instance a society separates the economic from the political and creates a limited space for decision-making wherein decisions have more authority



than those decisions and communications enacted elsewhere in social life. Organizations should be temporary, tied to the need they were formed to address, and they should be overlapping and pluralistic. Otherwise, they develop interests of their own survival and growth that can easily conflict with the needs of people. This organizational self-interest has been used time and time again to control and recuperate radical social movements. It should long ago have become obvious that using formal organizations is risky, something best done with caution. Yet some organizational anarchists even persist in believing that all

anarchists should join a single organization. I have never seen an argument for how this could possibly be effective, and the question is irrelevant since it is neither possible nor would it be liberating. Voluntary association is a meaningless principle if you expect everyone to join a particular organization, even if it is perfect. But I've still heard a number of anarchist-communists use that obnoxious line, "they're not real anarchists," on the basis that these not-anarchists did not want to work with them. The interest of working together in an effective organization, especially if it is singular (as in, *The Only Anarchist Group You'll Ever Need to Join!*), encourages conformity of ideas

among members, which can cause them to waste a great deal of time coming up with the Correct Line and can make them a pain in the ass for other folks to work with. (The 1995 pamphlet 'The Role of the Revolutionary Organization' by the Anarchist Communist Federation is very clear that they see theirs as only a single one of many organizations working in the movement, and they renounce the aim of any kind of organizational hegemony; perhaps the problem is the lack of a deep recognition that these many organizations may approach, relate to, or conceive of the movement in entirely different ways).