

# Some thoughts on organization

P. Murtaugh

Spring 1978

What is the type of organization that we, as anarchists, libertarian socialists and libertarian Marxists, should be working towards? What should be our immediate organizational goals? It is not enough to simply deplore the present lack of serious organizational work amongst anti-authoritarians. Some sort of concrete plan must be set forward to deal with the circumstances we find ourselves in.

In order to find out what sort of plan we should put forward we should first take a long hard look at the present state of our movement in this part of the world. In doing this we should neither overestimate our strength by labelling every decentralized protest movement anarchist or libertarian (often these movements are merely temporarily decentralized as various authoritarians are working mightily to take them over). Neither should we overestimate the strength of our opponents to the extent that we advocate imitating their propaganda style and organizational forms slavishly. This is not going to gain us the recruits they presently make; all it will do is attach us as a tail to the commie dog. And doom us to eternal marginality! I feel that we should recognize the inherent limitations, in our context, of the commie style and concept of revolution.

To deal with the most obvious fact first, the romantic idea of The Revolution (do we always have to capitalize it?) as a gigantic street fight is ridiculous in the extreme. In the first place the present military forces in North America are too strong to be defeated by military insurrection. The most that such a frontal assault on the state could produce is more repression. Second, should an insurrection succeed by some miracle (molotov cocktails and 303s against Phantom Jets — fat chance!) we would be confronted by the fact that our societies (Canada and the U.S.) are hardly of the type that could survive the chos involved in a civil war. Perhaps five per cent of the population have any access at all to self sufficiency. Revolutions are not glorious events where everyone goes out singing the Red Flag, shoots the police, hangs the boss and immediately takes possession of all the wealth of the world in pristine mint condition. They are long, bloody, destructive, and, above all, chaotic events. Just think what would happen if the majority of people no longer had Safeway and McDonald's to gently nurse them. No rhetoric please about "people will work these things out". They'd starve. How many millions are you willing to see sacrificed to the glorious future? Also, stop and consider what the first response of starving people is — THEY WANT A STRONGMAN TO SAVE THEM. Finally, I don't think that any reasonable person could deny the fact that the atomic umbrella that our empire has built up to supposedly protect itself against the

Russian empire is also trained on us. Do you expect to put up a barricade high enough to stop a missile?

Second, we have to recognize the main barrier to non-insurrectional revolution (this is not equivalent to non-violent revolution) is the inability of liberatory organizations and actions to build up a competing system. We do not live in a capitalist society where the ruling class reacts to threats to its hegemony by either repression or bribery. We live in a managerial society where the inner dynamics of the competing and co-operating bureaucracies drive them to integrate threats, to turn them into means of strengthening themselves (though repression is still often used). Our response to the ruling class should be not to try to push them with demands (they love it), but rather to build up links between the various isolated struggles. A new system should be built. Food co-ops should be linked to strikes. The mostly urban based left should re-investigate its relationship to the countryside. ETC, ETC, ETC.

The building of such links should be intermediate level goal. We have to get ourselves together first, but this eventual goal should be kept in mind. We cannot imitate the commies and set up our organizations with no other goal than to put pressure on the ruling class, especially since the jackpot that supposedly comes at the end of this process, the big time revolution, is probably impossible. Such organizations will either be marginalized or will be integrated a la the Communist parties of west Europe. The commies, if they do consider 'links' necessary, think that the function of link should be reserved to the party alone. This should not be our goal also. The links between struggles will not be built just because a group intervenes with theory. We must proceed to gather the technical resources that these links will need. This is a question that should occupy our thoughts now, not at some in the future. What exactly will be the resources that various struggles will need to link up? Transportation? Radios? Computing power?

Anyway, moving from the future into the present, what is the present state of the anarchist movement in our part of the world? Our organizations that span localities such as the SRAF or the IWW (I realize that the IWW is not 'exactly' anarchist, but it is close enough to be counted as libertarian) comprise perhaps 1000 members, at a liberal estimate. Other organized anarchists, and other libertarians, comprise perhaps double that amount, once again at a liberal estimate. A pretty poor showing in a population of over 200 million. The number of convinced anarchists who are not members of formal groups comprise perhaps ten to fifteen thousand. I think that these figures point out an immediate task. What is the matter with the two large scale organizations? Why do the majority of anarchists refuse to join them? Even more importantly, why are the vast majority of anarchists unorganized? I don't believe that it is because they are all individualist anarchists.

I would like to deal with the latter question first. One of the great reasons why the majority of anarchists are unorganized is th that many anarchists consider that any specific anarchist organization is somehow 'counter-revolutionary', an imposition on the people. Organizational libertarians have failed to criticise this position thoroughly enough. This is perhaps the most important 'theoretical' task of our movement. It was good to see the article 'Why the Leninists Will Win' in the last issue of the Red Menace as a beginning of this criticism. While the non-organizational anarchists may refuse to help us in practical work they still read anarchist literature. Perhaps we can persuade them of the contradiction of refusing to work on specifically anarchist projects while working in organizations controlled by far less savory groups and individuals as many of them do.

As to those unorganized anarchists who are afraid to declare their anarchism because of possible loss of jobs, harassment, etc., I feel that they should not be allowed to act as brakes on the more militant members.

Now, as to the main organizations in North America, the SRAF and the IWW, it seems that their main problem is the fact that they offer little in the way of organizational resources to groups affiliated or to members. Each city or locality is almost totally self-contained. The accumulated experience and resources of long term groups are not made available to neophyte groups. The result is an immensely high rate of turnover and mortality in newly formed libertarian groups. The local narrowness of the member groups of these organizations has to be overcome. At the present time we should not be thinking so much of expanding the presently existing groups as of forming ones in new localities.

With all of the above in mind, what are the concrete tasks that we should be thinking of at the present time? The first task is probably the correction of the lamentable state of our press. The libertarian movement does not have a North American paper, even though it has dozens of magazines. The appeal of magazines is inherently limited. Our goal should be the establishment of a weekly (if possible) newspaper, enjoying wide newsstand distribution across North America. The most likely candidate for such an organ is the Open Road, published out of Vancouver. Its present publishing frequency is far too infrequent (4 times a year). Serious attention should be paid to increasing its distribution to the point where it can begin to publish more frequently. If necessary, this may mean giving consideration to the idea of canvassing the libertarian movement for funds for the support of full time staffers for the Open Road.

The second task is probably the establishment of a serious program of publication of various materials, utilizing a press and other materials that are our own and are not dependent on some government grant. Maybe such a thing already exists. If it does, however, its existence is mostly unknown to the general North American libertarian movement.

Which brings up still another point. Just exactly what is the state of our present resources? What materials, printing resource, speakers, advice, knowledge, etc. do the various isolated N.A. libertarian groups have available to help each other? Too little interchange of a practical nature has taken place between groups. This should be one of the immediate tasks also. The establishment of a serious program of touring speakers should be uppermost in our minds at the present time.

Many of the above tasks are already being thought about in a disjointed fashion amongst libertarians. Some are even being acted upon. The problem is that the action undertaken by isolated groups falls into a void the minute it goes beyond their local horizons. Believe it or not, we do have trans-local groups (the SRAF and the IWW). While criticisms can certainly be made of these groups, it is still incumbent on libertarians to make them from within the organizations it question. It is useless to carp and complain from the outside, while refusing to help in the transformation of these organizations into effective organisms.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



P. Murtaugh  
Some thoughts on organization  
Spring 1978

Retrieved on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2020 from <https://libcom.org/library/some-thoughts-organization>  
*Published in Volume 2, Number 2 of The Red Menace, Spring 1978.*

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](https://theanarchistlibrary.org)**