

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



The Union Makes Us Weak

William Gillis

13th April 2009

First, let's ignore the non sequitur anti-science and anti-tech bullshit for now, since perspectives on either have absolutely nothing to do with post-leftism. After all while there are primies and anti-civs within the post-left, there are also a plethora of transhumanists, cyberpunk and general internet-loving radicals who see invention and exploration as inherently liberatory acts.

Post Left Anarchists are functionally distinct from Left Anarchists in our distaste and suspicion of organization. That is to say our focus on critiquing the drive for organization-as-an-ends-unto-itself. Yes, we recognize that for all the profound changes in social and economic context since the days of yore, there are still workers and bosses and that very real advantages can be wrung out of the system through collective action. But we find the drive for mass and momentum as a primary ends to be constricting and ultimately self-crippling. We see Left Anarchists, and the Left as a whole, as instinctively clinging to the idea of numbers as a solution. Perhaps this is primarily a relic of those ancient days when any social adversary could be squashed by simply throwing enough bodies at it, or perhaps it is a perversion wrought by years of indoctrination in

William Gillis
The Union Makes Us Weak
13th April 2009

[http://humaniterations.net/2009/04/13/
the-union-makes-us-weak/](http://humaniterations.net/2009/04/13/the-union-makes-us-weak/)

theanarchistlibrary.org

democratic ideals. Modern politics views building mass as the *definition* of success — and certainly we will not see anything near true anarchy until every single human being comes to the realization that power relations are always evil — but getting people to march under a banner is not the same thing as bringing them to a fuller appreciation of the nature of power. (Similarly, discussions on class-relations circa 1917 will not lay the groundwork to the better interpersonal relations that must come before any larger project.) And yet we feel that too often conventional Left Anarchists focus on getting people into the organization (as well as building the solidity of said organization and its brand name) to the detriment of these fundamentals.

Maybe that was pragmatic a century ago, but today mass matters a whole heck of a lot less. The state, the class system, etc, are underpinned less through the application of blunt social force and more through complicated machinations. The ecosystems of power relations we find ourselves embedded within can sustain great pressure, they can handle mass. The key to winning the war today is not mass — we're not out to win some Revolution as though it were an election by another name — the key is intelligent proactive exploitation of weak spots. Killing the motherfucker will involve a whole lot less brute grappling and a whole lot more hacking. We will win not as an army of soldiers but an insurrection of generals.

Hence our annoyance with the inclination to build a sense of structure and mass first and apply it — or figure out how to apply it — second. We've always seen the world we're building as an ad hoc one of projects and discussions, not organizations and federations. Our take away from this dream is the realization that if a project needs to focus on structure and lines of inclusion and exclusion in order to motivate action then, in the words of a cute kitten, "*ur doin' it wrong.*" The Union hasn't made us strong, the Union's made us weak. It's wasted our time, suppressed our innovation and chained us to groupthink.

That's not to say that we're completely different from Left Anarchists. Certainly they as well have at times expressed a mild realization of the problems with this, just as we have participated in large federations and wasted hours of our life in rooms debating process documents. But even if it's only a matter of degree, in practice this difference of opinion/desire/strategy is still an important distinction.

And, if we are to be allowed to make this distinction, it's worth noting that our perspective is quite at odds with the overwhelming historical nature of the Left. Or, at the very least, the Left outside of Anarchism. So why the hell not define the Left in these terms of mass and structure worship and ourselves as outside it?

"Perhaps it is the American political climate which demonises "socialism" (in all its forms, equating it to Stalinism usually), a climate they are adjusting themselves to?"

And why shouldn't we?!

Putting aside Iain's smug british-chauvinism in this quote, it's worth wondering just why in the hell anyone should want to continue fighting a definitional war over "The Left." The Left-Right polarity in politics has shifted dramatically throughout history and is grounded in an almost meaningless obscurity. There were radical free market folks of worse behavior than the worst ancap today who sat to the left of the president's chair. Even worse the revolutionary distinction between "left and right" was in the popular mind considered one of action vs theory. Surely none of us want to chain ourselves to one of those at the total expense of the other?

Yes, in America "The Left" is largely synonymous with authoritarian socialism and paternalism... just as it is in the rest of the world. Even if the devastating effects of the Soviet Union's influence could be overcome in the public's mind, that's not a battle most anarchists around the world are fighting. In much of Latin America and Eastern Europe anarchists have completely abandoned self-identification as Leftists.

Western Europe is a more complicated matter, but there are plenty of anarcho-syndicalists who refuse to call themselves left. Just as similar although not entirely overlapping numbers of folk have abandoned the term “socialism”. Indeed, on a global scale, the British Isles seem to be the only ones making a shrill fuss about this.

Yes there’s a history that’s important to be aware of. Folks who took exception to the same things we take exception to but worked under the Left nonetheless because it was the only possible game in town back then. But things have changed and the example of the rest of the Left and Socialism, much less their influence, have become concrete blocks on our feet. We fight over the definition of the word “anarchy” because we’re forced to. Because an-archy has a clear etymological definition that it’ll never shed and we have a drastically different evaluation of “without rulership.” We’re going to have to die on that hill no matter how strategically inopportune. But “social-ism” much less “left” are fluid, entirely fucking arbitrary words. They’re defined by what they’re associated with. And that’s pretty awful company.